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A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

FRANK TROLLOPE,

Author of "An Old Man's Secret," "Broken Fetter," &c., &c.

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OLD TIMES REVIVED.

CHAPTER I.

WE return to De Briffault.

When his wife and the man-at-arms entered his room, there was a look of great anguish in the gouty man's face. He pushed back the bed-curtain, and, in a very irritable voice, exclaimed—

“ How is it that I am disturbed ? ”

“ This soldier is the bearer of good news,” said the wife.

The man-at-arms made a profound bow.

“What news do you bring?” demanded the suffering invalid.

“News that will gladden your heart,” said the dame, affectionately.

“From whom?”

“From Fitzgerald.”

“From Fitzgerald?” repeated De Briffault.

“Yes, my lord,” said the man-at-arms. “Your brave squire has sent me to announce to you that you are master of your old enemy’s stronghold—that he is now in possession of the Castle of De Liancourt.”

“Master of De Liancourt’s Castle! did you say, my man?” exclaimed De Briffault, in a very excited voice.

“Yes; our commander and his men have taken possession of it.”

And De Briffault, in his joy, forgot the gout for the moment, and lay on his back

singing and waving his velvet night-cap in the air, exclaiming—

“ De Liancourt and his son killed ! Not a male of the family left ?”

“ Not one. The daughter and the old dame are in the Castle.”

“ Hang the old dame, and shut up the girl in a convent !” said the gouty man ; and again he waved his velvet cap.

“ Oh, brave Fitzgerald ! He is the man for me ! He shall have the conquered lands and the Castle as well. I shall be the grand seigneur ! Oh, brave Fitzgerald !”

De Briffault’s joy was perhaps a trifle too noisy and undignified. Again he tossed up his cap, and laughed, and chuckled, and sang, and snapped his fingers, and then roared at feeling a twinge of his malady. Again he

tossed up his cap, till another twinge, sharper than the first, caused a second roar.

“ My dear,” said his lady, quietly, “ had you not better remain quiet?”

“ Remain quiet !” he cried, “ how is it possible ! Remember the glorious triumph ! Have not the De Briffaults for more than a century and a half tried in vain to accomplish what I have achieved ! No, my dear, I cannot remain quiet.”

Another source of happiness flitted across the corpulent knight’s mind—there would now be an end of war ! In his heart he hated war and loved peace, although, for the sake of his reputation, he had deemed it requisite, from time to time, to bluster in praise of war, and to call upon his departed valiant old cousin to do all the fighting for him, whilst he had reaped the benefits.

The Dame de Briffault took part in his joy ; but with more dignified demeanor and quietness ; whilst the whole of the inmates of the Castle next day rejoiced greatly, and feasting and merriment reigned throughout ; although a part of the garrison were sleeping the sleep of death beneath the freshly raised mound.

Stephen Stanley, despite evasions and remonstrances, was sent on a fleet horse, from the side of his adored Marie, as a kind of ambulating letter, to convey to Fitzgerald De Briffault's hearty thanks.

“ What am I to say to Fitzgerald ? ” asked Stephen.

“ Tell him he has my warmest thanks for the great service he has rendered me ; and that as soon as this cursed gout leaves me I will see that he is knighted.”

“ Is there any other message ? ”

“ Yes,” said the corpulent knight ; “ tell him that as I have ample domains for myself, and those belonging to me, I will make over to him all De Liancourt’s possessions.”

“ Unconditionally ?” asked Stephen.

“ No ; with these sole conditions—that he will neither cede nor sell them to the most remote of De Liancourt’s heirs ; and that he will help me and mine in all wars, offensive and defensive, and for ever remain my firm ally.”

Stephen forthwith went to Marie’s apartment, and after many loving words, and more kisses, he departed on his mission to his friend, and was not slow in reaching De Liancourt’s Castle.

He was not long in detailing to his friend and ally the joyful promises of De Briffault.

“ And so, Fitz, your fortune is made,” said Stephen ; “ and you can immediately set up as

a lord, and a licensed man-slayer ! I wish you joy, with all my heart; and, in truth, you richly deserve it all."

"Thank you, Stephen, for all your kind wishes, and the good news you have brought me. But tell me, what have you been doing since we parted ?"

"Oh ! making good use of my time ; so give *me* joy !"

"Of what ?"

"Of having secured the love of beautiful Marie, who has promised to become Mrs. Stephen Stanley !"

"Mrs. Stephen Stanley !" repeated his friend, in some astonishment.

"Yes, Mrs. Stephen Stanley."

"You are joking, Stephen."

"I never was more in earnest. It is quite true."

“But what will De Briffault and his dame say to it?”

“Oh! my dear fellow, I don’t do these things by halves. I got the father’s consent before I asked Marie, and the dame had not a word to say against it.”

Fitzgerald shook his friend’s hand heartily, and as heartily congratulated him.

“By George! Stephen, it was a lucky day that brought us to France.” So saying, the two firm friends and allies again shook hands.

“Come, Stephen, you will want to refresh the inner man, after your long and quick ride, and we can then talk over all that has occurred since we parted.”

A substantial repast was set out, and Stephen ate a great deal, and talked a great deal; but of nothing but his “beautiful

Marie," to which Fitzgerald listened in silence, and wondered how Isabelle de Liancourt would like the new Lord of the Castle.

Fitzgerald pursued this line of thought after Stephen's departure, for despite all his friend's entreaties that he would remain, he declared his intention of returning that very night to the abode of his beloved Marie, and so he did.

The esquire's thoughts still pursued the same subject as he paced the walls in the soft twilight, when the evening star shone a solitary one in the purple sky; and the brown, horrid-looking bats flitted hither and thither. He pursued this train of thought till the Lady Isabelle de Liancourt's rosy-cheeked page stood and bowed before him.

"*Eh bien! Quoi*, what is it, my lad?" Fitzgerald asked.

“ My mistress, the Lady Isabelle de Liancourt, wishes to see you.”

“ Oh ! *bon ! Allez garçon.* I’ll follow you,” said Fitzgerald, and the page, scarcely understanding what the esquire said, turned and retraced his steps, followed briskly by the Englishman.

Isabelle de Liancourt was sitting with an old priest, the director of the consciences of many a De Liancourt, and appearing somewhat agitated and fearful.

Fitzgerald looked on her with a pleasure he had never before experienced, and felt impatient to hear the sound of her voice.

“ I am told,” said the Lady Isabelle, “ that a messenger has this day arrived with despatches from De Briffault.”

“ That is quite true,” answered Fitzgerald.

“ May I beg of you, Monsieur, to tell me if

anything respecting my dear mother and myself has been communicated?"

Her beautiful eyes were fixed anxiously on the young esquire, but he did not for a time make any reply.

If the truth must be told, Fitzgerald had been so engrossed in looking at Isabelle, that, strange as it may seem, he had not heard a word she had said.

"Give the esquire a seat," said the old priest, to the page.

Fitzgerald sat down, and addressing himself to the lady, said—

"What?"

Isabelle turned to the priest and begged him to repeat her words, as she feared she had not made herself understood.

The Englishman listened attentively, then glanced quickly at Isabelle, whose eyes were

fixed steadily upon him, and keeping silence, Fitzgerald soliloquised—

“What the devil am I to do? By George! she’ll cry if I tell her all, and I cannot stand that. Better perhaps tell it her by little and little. Just from day to day, one thing at a time, and that will serve to give me an opportunity of seeing her the oftener.”

Fitzgerald’s fair forehead was suffused with crimson as he thought this. Now, this suffusion, coupled with his silence, alarmed Isabelle, who vehemently, almost frantically exclaimed—

“I entreat you, Sir Squire—”

“Fear not,” cried Fitzgerald, interrupting her, and at the same time looking most kindly on her. “I am to be made commander of your castle for the present; that’s all, don’t be frightened.”

“ Has nothing else been communicated to you ? ” asked the priest, with earnestness.

“ I cannot understand you , ” said Fitzgerald, and in spite of all the priest’s and the lady’s efforts, aided by the anxious, rosy cheeked little page, he would not understand.

He told them that he was to keep possession till De Briffault’s malady would allow him to come over ; and added, as gallantly as he could, looking kindly on Isabelle —

“ I am very happy that the old lord has the gout ! ”

Isabelle smiled, despite her misfortunes, at this speech, and reproved him for his cruelty in expressing such a wish.

Three pages now made their appearance with supper. Fitzgerald was invited to partake of it. Could he refuse ? No ! Neither did he. In spite of Isabelle’s horror of the

English, and of everything appertaining to de Briffault, Fitzgerald, before he retired, and notwithstanding his bad French, induced the young lady to make an exception in his favour. His frankness, his *bonhomie*, his kind and amiable expression, and the softness of his voice when he spoke to her, gave her the greatest confidence in him. She was sure he might be trusted, that he was her friend—and in a very small whisper, so small that she scarcely heard it—she added, “and if he asks something more.”

This being the state of affairs when they parted after supper, he bowed reverently, she gave him her hand, accompanied with a very charming smile.

The smile dazzled his eyes like a flash of lightning, and taking her hand, he pressed it with great warmth; but in the next instant

let it drop, as if it had been a hot iron, and turning sharply round, without another word, or even a look, he strode from the room.

Before going to his chamber, Fitzgerald betook himself to the walls to inspect the guard, and ascertain that all was right for night. This duty accomplished, he ascended to the huge room in which he was lodged.

“Love has marred me once and done it well,” he ruminated. “I am fast falling in love again, I can see that plainly enough. Well, so be it! The first part of the witch’s prophecy has been accomplished. I have been marred, and lost all through love. Let me see, what was the second part of the said prophecy? ‘Love should make me?’ Upon my honor, I do love this damsel, and I am vain enough to believe she has no great dislike to me. Under all the circumstances of

the case, I can see no harm that loving Isabelle can do; I shall have her castle and lands, and she, through me, shall have them returned to her again!"

Here the Englishman paused, as if a different note had been struck on his brain, and after a few minutes he again ruminated.

"What if she should scorn my love? Well, the wars are a good safeguard against despair, so I'll try my luck and win the fair damsel if I can!"

Fitzgerald, having come to this conclusion, resolved that Isabelle should not know that her lands were to be his, until, at the same time, he declared his love and asked her hand.

The following morning our hero's first step was to despatch a man to de Briffault's castle, to ask his friend Stephen to send him all his best and gayest apparel.

In these fine clothes, when they were brought, he instantly arrayed himself, and from day to day he continued this unusual attention to his appearance, with due reverence presented himself before the daughter of De Liancourt, and returned from each interview more deeply in love than before, hoping much, and making himself happy from any little mark of kindness she bestowed on him.

Nearly two months had passed away, and the gout still held De Briffault fast in its clutches, and Fitzgerald continued to bask in Isabelle's soft looks, till he flattered himself he had won her love.

Fitzgerald's rambles were not now nearly so long as was customary. He escorted Isabelle in her walks outside the castle walls, and the first time the Dame de Liancourt went forth, he rode beside the litter, and won

the invalid's heart by his little attentions so kindly though so roughly bestowed. Every morning, by her page, he sent her a bouquet of wild flowers, fresh gathered; for in one of her morning airings she had said she liked them.

In short, for those seven or eight weeks, Fitzgerald was ever hanging about the Castle, instead of riding, as was his wont, here and there and everywhere, scouring the country in all directions.

“Isabelle loves me!” he said to himself; and so she did. She loved him as she would a kind brother, a faithful dog, or a trusty old retainer. That was all; and whether this would induce her to wed him must be disclosed in the future.

It was not Isabelle's fault if the Englishman interpreted her kindness and her smiles as

love. If he had had more experience in love affairs he might have seen that she was too open and unembarrassed for him to flatter himself as he did. However, he had happy moments, for he basked in the sunshine of her smiles ; he never let an opportunity escape of entering her presence and paying her all those little attentions which are so much prized by the gentler sex. In fact, the sturdy knight's happiness consisted in making the lovely Isabelle his constant care.

CHAPTER II.

So stood matters when one thoroughly wet day Isabelle De Liancourt was in attendance on her mother, whose health had considerably improved, and Fitzgerald was amusing himself with the antics of several frolicsome dogs in the hall ; and as they barked and jumped about him, was thinking that dinner would never be ready, and that he should never see Isabelle again, for now he was admitted to dine with the ladies and the old priest. As all this

was taking place, and the rain continued to pour down in torrents, a clatter of horses' hoofs made itself heard, and Fitzgerald immediately left the hall, the dogs running barking after him.

Covered with thick cloaks, shining with wet, sat, on their dripping steeds, Stephen Stanley and De Briffault's head squire. Part of the garrison had already gathered around the two horsemen.

"Hallo! Stanley, what's in the wind now?" cried Fitzgerald.

"What's in the wind? what's in the water you mean," laughed Stephen, jumping from his horse, and shaking the rain from his cloak.

"Well, come with me," and Stephen followed his friend in to the hall, De Briffault's head squire joining himself to the other party.

No sooner had Stanley thrown aside his wet coverings than Fitzgerald said—

“ Stephen, my lad, what in the name of all the saints brings you here?”

“ Why, Master Thomas, I am come to deprive you of the command of this noble Castle, and to give it in charge of the worthy head squire, in De Briffault’s name.”

“ Why ?” demanded Fitzgerald, casting down his eyes and thinking what would become of Isabelle and her mother.

“ Many a slip between the cup and the lip, my fine fellow. So you must turn out and give this fellow of De Briffault’s the command.”

“ What then ?”

“ What then ?” said Stephen. “ You must back with me to the Castle.”

“ Why ?”

“ Why ? Because De Briffault, my worthy and respected father-in-law that is to be, will have it so, man. First, however, let us have something to eat and something to drink ; and if you will order two fresh horses to be saddled, we will trot back together through this beautiful and refreshing rain.”

The rosy-cheeked page coming into the hall just at the moment, was desired to order dinner to be served immediately.

Fitzgerald remained perfectly mute for a few moments, looking disappointed and sad, and patting the head of a large dog that stood near him. He sighed deeply, causing his friend Stephen to laugh heartily. This outburst of laughter from his friend induced him to look up and exclaim—

“ I tell you what, Stephen, if you know the reason why another is to be put over my

head I will thank you to tell me without loss of time, and without any more laughter. What have I done? Do you know?"

"Well, then, in all seriousness, I am come to fetch you to my wedding, which is to take place to-morrow?"

"And is that all?"

"All!"

"Yes, all."

"No, it is not all," cried Stephen, with a knowing nod of his head.

"What else?"

"Merely the fact that an Englishman, one Squire Thomas Fitzgerald, is to be knighted the following day."

"Knighted!" exclaimed Fitzgerald, and he held out his hand to his friend and firm ally, which hand was firmly pressed by Stephen, who continued—

“The following day there will be a tilting bout, and I know not what beside.”

“And what about this Castle?” asked Fitzgerald, hesitatingly.

“Oh! it will be crammed full of people in every room and corner.”

“Nonsense, man, I don’t mean De Briffault’s castle,” said Fitzgerald.

“Then what castle do you mean?” asked Stephen, as if he did not know what his friend meant.

“Why De Liancourt’s.”

“Oh, the worthy squire who came with me will take the command for the week that you are to be absent. At the expiration of that time De Briffault and all of us are to return with you to see you installed in your noble domain. That is all.”

“Stephen, my lad, the good news you

bring has made me very happy," said Fitzgerald, with brightened countenance.

"You have only just made the discovery I should imagine," said Stephen, "for you looked confoundedly glum only a few minutes since."

At this moment a page summoned Fitzgerald to join the ladies and the priest at dinner.

"That's a joyful sound," said Stephen, "for I'm very hungry."

"Your refreshments shall be sent to you without delay," said Fitzgerald.

"You don't mean to say that I am not to dine with you and the ladies?"

"I fear it must be so."

"Why?"

"Because—because—"

"Because what?"

"You are not invited."

“ Not invited ! Whew ! I have my suspicions,” cried Stephen, with a knowing look.

“ Suspicions of what ?”

“ That I shall have to dine alone, whilst you go and confess.”

“ To whom ?”

“ To Lady Isabelle’s priest, I suppose.”

The colour mounted to Fitzgerald’s temples, and Stephen’s dinner being brought in, he rushed away to join the ladies.

When they had been seated a short time, Fitzgerald said—

“ I am summoned to attend De Briffault, and must depart in an hour ;” he looked stealthily at Isabelle to see what effect his announcement would have upon her. “ The day after to-morrow I am to receive my knighthood.”

Isabelle was wary, and congratulated Fitzgerald on his expected preferment.

At the moment of his departure the Dame De Liancourt, who had conceived a great affection for the young Englishman, gave him her hand to kiss, which ceremony he performed with becoming veneration; and bowing to Isabelle, her hand was also put forth, and he imprinted a kiss upon it, which produced a sensation that lingered some time.

On leaving the ladies, Fitzgerald rejoined his friend Stephen, who, in spite of being so desperately in love, was giving full proof that although he had lost his heart he had not lost his appetite.

“ By George ! Fitz, my ride has made me desperately hungry. I shall have finished in a minute or two.”

“Don’t hurry, my lad; we shall have plenty of time.”

“Ah! that’s all very well for you to say; but if you knew how anxious Marie will be till I get back, you wouldn’t talk of not being in a hurry.”

“As ardent as ever,” remarked Fitzgerald, with a smile.

“And so would you be if you were going to be married to-morrow.”

“Perhaps so.”

“Perhaps so; I am sure you would.”

“I can’t tell.”

“Of course you can’t.”

“Well, Stephen, by the time you have satisfied your appetite I shall be prepared to start. I will order the horses at once.”

De Briffault’s meeting with the young Englishman was very tender; he folded him

in a long embrace, patting his back vehemently, and vociferating loudly all the time.

“ You are a brave youth ! You have saved me ! You are an angel, my good and excellent Fitzgerald ! ”

Again he patted the “ angel’s ” back, who was looking shy and angry over fat De Brifault’s shoulder, saying, in a low voice—

“ Stuff—cursed nonsense. Can’t you let me go ? ”

It was, however, some time before he was released.

Fitzgerald had left the castle like a mole, through the underground passage. He returned amidst gaiety and pleasure, for the building was full of guests, all noisy in their joy, all gorgeously arrayed, all courteous, all fit associates for the occasion.

There, too, was the Chevalier de Berrier, who had vainly courted Marie, consoling himself with smiling and being smiled upon by another fair lady. Stephen and Marie were the gayest of the gay, the happiest of the happy, full of smiles and glee. Fitzgerald, too, smiled and spoke his peculiar style of French to many a laughing listener.

The whole of the party retired to their apartments to rest from pleasure, and the bright sun shone resplendently the next morning to do honour to the wedding.

There was poor, penniless, Stephen Stanley decked out like a nobleman in cloth of gold, with chains and jewels, as he led forth his bride arrayed still more richly. Oh! how fortune loveth some men! The ceremony was performed, the mass was sung by lungs of brass, and the music was played by fingers of iron, so vehemently were both done.

Feasting and dancing, gaming and music, filled up the rest of the day, and a very joyous day it was.

Fitzgerald felt a serene happiness filling all his soul amidst the noisy mirth, but he feasted somewhat silently amidst the universal chatter, and told himself that he, too, should soon have a merry bridal and a huge castle.

Midnight found the squire keeping his second *veille d'armes*. The moon shed a melancholy light through the high windows, as it had done on the night of his first watch, and his mind was occupied with the events of that night and their results. He remembered Bertha Bruce's visit, and he thought on her beauty and then on her perfidy.

“She was a handsome girl,” he mused, “and I could have loved her well if I had given way to my feelings. Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had. But that is

all past, and there is no use thinking about it."

This night no fair lady visited him during his watch, and the next day he was knighted by De Briffault, whose small black eyes sparkled with pleasure. Beautiful ladies had been chosen to put on his golden spurs, and Marie Stanley girt on his splendid sword. The knight stood encased in complete armour, and became it well.

"He is not a bad looking youth," "It's a pity he is not French," "But he is a charming Englishman," and numerous other approving sentences were uttered, whilst Fitzgerald's heart beat happily beneath its steel covering, and he said to De Briffault—

"I will never disgrace the sword you have given me, nor the honour which you have conferred upon me. I take Heaven to witness I will not."

“I know you will not, *mon brave!*” said De Briffault.

Feasting, dancing, music, and gaming were again the order of the day. The newly made knight was the principal object of attraction. Bright dames, who scarcely noticed him the day before, now condescended to exercise some little courtesy towards him. He was pleased, but nothing more, and ended by talking of war and wounds with some half-dozen old knights, who no longer were favoured with soft looks and tender words from the fair sex.

He was now a knight. What happiness! and how greatly was that happiness increased the next morning when De Briffault presented him with a noble charger, dark brown and glossy as velvet, with arching neck and pawing foot, whereon in due time he found him-

self within the lists, attended by two sturdy squires, and about to play a knight's part in the tournament.

The sky was serene, a slight fresh wind blew, and waved and rustled the many-coloured flags and feathers. Numerous voices shouted and laughed, and the multitude lay about on the grass in a state of pleasing excitement, till drums and trumpets announced the approach of the Seigneur and the Dame de Briffault, together with their gay and noble company.

At a given signal the knights dashed forward and did their best; some conquered and rejoiced, and some were vanquished and bore it with a very bad grace. Many young damsels wished that Sir Thomas Fitzgerald could be their *preux chevalier*, and many eyes were fixed upon him, and many silvery voices

praised him; but he had no thought, no eyes, except for arms and men.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's turn came. De Briffault, who felt an extraordinary degree of pride for his *protégé*, ordained that it should come last, so that—as he exultingly told his son-in-law, Stephen—he might have the honour of being the conqueror of the conqueror.

It strangely enough happened that this conqueror was no less a person than the Chevalier de Berrier, who was proud of his conquests, and gay as gay could be.

“ De Berrier struts about like a peacock,” said Marie to her husband, “ vaunting and jesting with everyone, and twisting up his horrible moustache, shewing his fine teeth, and—”

“ Casting such glances towards the ladies,”

said Stephen, laughing. “I hope he will be more fortunate than he was with a certain unkind damsel not a very long time since.”

“A fortunate thing, Master Stephen, for you, that the unkind damsel could not discover his many good qualities,” replied his wife, with a look of affection.

“At any rate, Marie, although *you* were so blind to his perfections, *he* is more than aware of them himself,” cried Stephen, with a pleasant smile.

“Behold!” said Marie, “see with what a determined air the vain peacock is shaking his lance.”

“Yes; he evidently looks upon himself as ‘cock of the walk,’ ” responded Stephen.

“Who is the next knight De Berrier will have to encounter?” asked Marie of some one sitting near.

At this moment the Chevalier de Berrier ascertained that his next and last opponent would be Sir Thomas Fitzgerald. He rode gracefully up to De Briffault.

“Would it not be better,” he said, with a low bow to De Briffault, “that Sir Thomas Fitzgerald should be pitted against some other knight?”

“Why?” asked De Briffault.

“Because he is only a novice,” said De Berrier, vainly.

“Then I presume you consider yourself invincible?” said De Briffault.

“*Pauvre Anglais!*” was De Berrier’s reply to the remark.

“Well, De Berrier, Sir Thomas has not had much experience since he became a knight; but I would recommend you to be on your guard, and do your best, for Fitzgerald may

teach you that although you have conquered all others, he will be the conqueror of the conqueror, and prove to you that you are not invincible."

The knight smiled contemptuously, and looking at his new lady love, said —

"I will conquer for bright eyes."

And he cantered back to his place, humming a lively French air, and looking down complacently on his spurs as he rode.

Fitzgerald slowly closed his vizor, seated himself more firmly on his saddle, and without the slightest attempt at parade, rested his lance, and waited modestly till his opponent should be ready.

"Are you ready?" called out De Berrier, resting his lance with a flourish.

"Yes," was Fitzgerald's reply.

The combatants dashed on.

Not a minute had elapsed before the invincible De Berrier was rolling over and over on the earth, and his horse in the same predicament, whilst a shout was raised for Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, and by none of the party with more heartfelt pride than by Stephen Stanley and his bride.

De Berrier, the conquered man, arose, drew his sword, and flourishing it over his head, cried—

“ My cursed horse has betrayed me.”

And rushing up to De Briffault, in an excited state, he swore that the fight was unfair; that he was not vanquished, and much more in the same strain.

Every one spoke at once—some for one knight, some for the other. Each single voice was drowned, and gesticulation was consequently very rife among the crowd. All

the knights rode up to the spot, dashing against each other, and loudly exclaiming something which could not be heard. The ladies, too, added their voices to the din, and the whole multitude were equally vociferous. In fact, there was presented to the eye and the ear the most extraordinary spectacle—shrieking, hallooing, arguing, and nasal sounds—in the world, whilst hands were seen moving rapidly about among the gay-coloured throng, and heads wagging to and fro with bird-like velocity.

Suddenly a loud flourish from the heralds gained comparative silence; but it was not till after a second and a third flourish of trumpets the announcement could be heard:—

“That Sir Thomas Fitzgerald was willing once again to try his skill against the valiant Chevalier de Berrier.”

This announcement was hailed with much cheering from the assembled multitude.

“By Jove!” said Stephen to his bride, “Fitzgerald is a noble, as well as a brave, adversary. I will bet my life he will unhorse De Berrier a second time.”

“I hope so,” said Marie.

The chevalier having rested for a short time, tossed off a cup of wine, mounted a splendid horse, and grinding his teeth, rushed wrathfully against the Englishman.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald met him calmly, his feet firmly set in the stirrups, and his eye fixed equally firmly on his advancing antagonist.

The next moment the unfortunate De Berrier was picked cleverly from his saddle, and was a second time rolling on the ground.

Shouts, loud and long, rent the air. Sir Thomas was paraded round the lists, and being conducted to Marie, received from her hands a gold bracelet, studded with rich and rare gems.

Thus the ceremony ended, and the party repaired to feasting and all its accompanying pleasures.

The hero of the day was all in all ; he was made to sit by De Briffault's side—the place of honour—and to dance with the noblest ladies, compliments being literally showered upon him from all sides.

The magnificent bracelet became a matter of considerable speculation with the younger ladies of the assembled multitude.

“ What is he going to do with the bracelet ? ” asked one.

“ He cannot wear it,” said a second. “ I wonder if he will find some one who can ? ”

“I should hope,” said a third, “he will have made up his mind on whose arm he shall clasp it,” and she extended certainly a lovely shaped arm, white as alabaster.

The evening passed and late night brought an end to diversion and feasting; but Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, much to the surprise of some, and to the vexation of others among the fair sex, had smiled on no one in particular.

The bracelet had its destination, and when the newly-made knight sat alone in his chamber, he held it in his strong hands and laid it across his sturdy wrist. He smiled as the thought crossed his mind, how well it would look sparkling on Isabelle De Liancourt’s white arm, hiding the blue veins beneath its massive richness.

Early next day Sir Thomas repaired to his

friend Stanley's room. He found him sitting idle beside his wife, who was equally idle, playing with one of her raven ringlets, which on the sturdy knight's entrance he let fall from his fingers, and it rejoined its fellows around Marie's sunny face and smooth olive-coloured throat.

Sir Thomas bowed to the smiling wife and then spoke to her husband.

"Stephen," he said, shaking his friend's hand, "you can serve me where perhaps I cannot serve myself."

"How?" asked Stephen.

"I will tell you; but I am loth to take you from such goodly company," said the knight, looking towards Marie.

"Can I not serve you in this goodly company," laughed Stephen, repeating his friend's words.

Fitzgerald shook his head.

Stephen pinched Marie's cheek, saying with a demure look—

“ May I go ?”

“ Go !” cried Marie, “ you Englishmen seem never to be able to stay with ladies. You always talk, talk, talk your great secrets privately, and I must say show very little gallantry to your lady friends.”

Stephen put his hand over her mouth; she bit his fingers, and they both laughed heartily. The two friends walked off to Fitzgerald's apartment, where the suit of armour was suspended in all its shining glory, waiting till its master's deeds should cause it to lose all trace of its present smoothness.

“ Well, sir knight,” asked Stephen, “ how am I to serve you ?”

Fitzgerald folded his arms and fixed his

delighted eyes on the bright hollow mass of steel that hung, with gaping visage on the wall before him.

“ Speak,” said Stephen.

“ It is truly a handsome, knightly suit,” began the knight.

“ Do you want me to help you put it on ?” asked Stephen, laughing.

“ No.”

“ Well, then, if I cannot assist you in putting on your armour, in what other way can I serve you ?”

“ I am in love.”

“ In love !” exclaimed Stephen, starting from the chair he was sitting upon. “ In love !” he repeated.

“ Yes, Stephen, in love.”

“ With whom ?”

“ With Isabelle De Liancourt.”

“I wish you joy, old friend,” said Stephen, seizing his hand and pressing it with friendly, nay, loving warmth.

They were silent for a minute, neither knowing exactly what to say next. Stephen was the first to break the silence, asking—

“What is it you wish me to do?”

“I wish you to use both your pen and your talent to let Isabelle De Liancourt know, in the most delicate manner possible, that I am the possessor of her castle and lands, and—and—”

Fitzgerald paused.

“How you desire to throw both yourself and her castle and lands at her feet! Is that it, my friend?”

“Yes—and—”

“And in return,” cried Stanley, “you hope she will throw herself into your strong arms!”

and they both laughed, Stephen especially, and after a few minutes' silence, the latter continued—

“ My dear Fitz, I can scarcely believe that I am not dreaming. Is it really true? I have given you all attention, and if you were not such a grave, proper thinking man, I should think you were laughing at me. So you are at last in love? Poor Thomas Fitzgerald! I long to be introduced to this perfection of dames and applaud your taste. She must be more than beautiful, more than an angel to have conquered you. Oh! you cunning fellow! If I had but known this last night I should have enjoyed what Marie and I overheard.”

“ What did you hear?”

“ Why a dozen or two delicate mouths and soft, silvery tongues asking who would wear

the bracelet, and as many fine eyes were looking lovingly on you, poor blind man! Oh! how the beautiful Marie will laugh!"

"Hold, Stephen" exclaimed his friend, "I must not have this secret in everyone's mouth for the present."

"Why not?"

"I may not succeed."

"Not succeed! Have you never hinted to her that you love her?"

"Not by speech."

"Oh!" laughed Stephen, "only by soft looks and tender—"

"Be serious, Stephen, if you can. I had hoped marriage would have tamed down your exuberant spirits."

"What, in a day or two?"

"Well, I beg you to keep my secret like a good man and true."

“ What! keep a secret from my wife! Will that be acting the part of what you call a good man and true? However, to prove to you that I can be serious, I pledge my word your secret shall be safely guarded.”

The letter was written in Stephen’s choicest French, interpreted to Sir Thomas word by word, and pronounced to be perfect. The missive was carefully folded and tied up, together with the bracelet, and, despatched by a trusty man on a fleet horse, carried to De Liancourt’s Castle, and safely deposited in the Lady Isabelle’s hand, who, having been taught to read by the monks, perused the letter, and duly admired the splendid bracelet; she carried both to her mother, the Dame de Liancourt.

“ My dear child,” the mother said, after the

daughter had read the letter to her, “what reply can we make?”

Isabelle was silent.

“It is fortunate that we have fallen into such generous hands; and well that De Brif-fault has not swept us from the face of the earth,” said the elder lady.

Isabelle still kept silent.

“I always loved that kind-hearted English-man,” the dame continued. “That dear Fitzgerald! He is worthy of you, my child. Be his, Isabelle! The castle and the lands will still be yours. What say you, my child?”

Isabelle spoke not, but kept her eyes fixed on the bracelet which she had clasped round her wrist. She seemed counting the stones with her fingers. At length, however, without looking up she said softly—

“But Pierre!”

“Pierre!” repeated the mother, fixing her

eyes on Isabelle, who turned half round, unclasped the bracelet and let it fall to the ground.

“What folly, my darling child. Pierre!” repeated the dame, “he has not been near you for nearly two years.”

“How could he? My father would not permit him!” cried Isabelle.

“Nonsense, child! If he had loved you he would have found plenty of means for seeing you.”

“He did love me!”

“*Did* love you!” repeated the dame, laying an emphasis on did.

“Yes, he did love me; and now my poor father is dead, he may, perhaps—”

Isabelle did not finish the sentence, but stooped to take up the bracelet, which she again clasped on her wrist.

“He may, perhaps—go on Isabelle,” cried the mother.

“He may, perhaps, come and claim me,” said the daughter.

“Never, my child—never!” said the mother, with something like a sigh. “Remember, Isabelle, you have nothing; and he, a horse, a suit of armour, and nothing else.”

“But I love him!”

“Folly! Take my advice. Marry Fitzgerald. Be wise, my child, and give not way to vain dreams!”

Now, to all this, the worthy dame added many sound and cogent reasons, many tender entreaties, and some few reproaches.

Isabelle listened, and Isabelle wept a little; and Isabelle was silent and miserable all day, and at night, when she kissed her mother, promised to think on all she had said.

The poor girl, however, as might have been expected, passed a sleepless night, and through her mind varied changes like those produced in a magic lantern were going on, and she saw plainly and vividly all the tender scenes that had passed between herself and Pierre. She remembered how fondly she was clasped to his breast when he declared his unchanging affection for her, and recollected their mutual vows of love. She saw her stern-hearted father drive him from the Castle, and at the same time apply the epithet of "paltry beggar" to the man she loved. She saw the last glance, full of sorrow and anger, he had cast upon her. She heard his voice, she saw his handsome face—past days seemed present with her—she felt she could never give him up; and the poor girl wept bitterly.

Then again she remembered that two years

had gone, and he had not seen her—had not even sought her. Perhaps he had forgotten her, perhaps he was another's; if so, where was the good of thinking about him? Where, indeed!

Then, again she thought of her mother, in her old age, being compelled to leave the Castle and the lands! Could she suffer such a calamity, when it was in her power to prevent it? No, she could not.

A second time uprose the image of Pierre, and the old happy days; and she wept a little, and hoped a little, and told herself she loved him; and anon, she saw her mother and herself seeking refuge, and vegetating in a convent. Then she became perplexed, and so all these doubts and fears went on a thousand times over; and the darkness of night began to give way to the grey of morning;

and the grey of morning, in its turn, gave way to the red sunlight, till, at length, sleep came to poor Isabelle's relief, and a respite to her miserable perplexity.

But, alas ! perplexity, and anxiety, and misery, and doubts, and fears, may sleep in sleeping ; but they will also awake in waking, and take their stand on their thrones, and again begin their rule. So when Isabelle awoke, then too came her train of embarrassments ; and again revelled through her brain her doubts, and fears, and hopes. But she possessed a share of the spirit of the De Lian-courts, and knitting her delicate brow, she said, in tremulous tones—

“Courage ! I will save you, dear mother !” and from that moment, whatever her private feelings might have been, her outward bearing was faultless.

She accepted Sir Thomas Fitzgerald!

The knight, in somewhat an impassioned manner, when he received Isabelle's acceptance of his proposal, called her the "darling of his heart!" at which exclamation his friend Stephen laughed heartily.

No time was lost by De Briffault in installing Fitzgerald in the Castle, giving him the parchments, as well as his consent to the marriage.

De Briffault pronounced Isabelle to be very different to her old devil of a father, though, by-the-bye, she was almost his counterpart.

CHAPTER III.

THE Dame de Liancourt and her daughter had taken up their abode for a time in a nunnery a short distance from the castle, and it was thither that Sir Thomas Fitzgerald repaired to see his affianced bride. There he sat with his eyes fixed on her, hazarding from time to time some speech of his best French, uttered with some embarrassment, and which was well received, as being a sign of his love, though not a polished sign, for the more he

loved the more rough grew Sir Thomas, especially when they were alone.

When the Dame de Liancourt was by, the knight could talk to Isabelle, look at Isabelle, and things went on smoothly enough, but when they were alone he fixed his eyes on the ground, and folded his stout arms, spoke laconically now and then, and stole sudden glances, seeming happy, yet disconcerted, when they were observed or returned.

One week more and Isabelle was to be Fitzgerald's! The very day and hour were, appointed, and all things were ready. The guests were all invited, and Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's heart throbbed lightly and tranquilly in his breast.

“Upon my soul!” thought he, as he betook himself to the nunnery in the evening, “I am a made man! I will make myself a name,

too, which Isabelle shall glory to hear. I am in a position to make alliances with noble houses—alliances both offensive and defensive, to strengthen myself with their strength, and to make France resound from one end to the other with my praises.”

He paused in his thoughts for some few minutes, and then resumed—

“ And what then? Why then for England! In spite of prophecy I will lay my bones in that dear old land.”

He pulled the nunnery bell, and the sound rang very clear through the building, and the meek-visaged portress informed him, with humbly abased eyes, that the Lady Isabelle had just walked out.

“ Thank you, my good woman. Which way did she take?”

“ I don’t know.”

Sir Thomas took the path to Isabelle's favourite retreat, and went in quest of her. This retreat was a small cave, floored with hard dry sand, near which gurgled a clear, gently-gliding stream, and from which the Castle De Liancourt and a wide fertile plain, bordered by distant mountains, were to be seen, now shining beneath the red evening sun.

There, on a low rock at the entrance of the cave sat the lovely Isabelle, but her eyes were not fixed on the wide landscape, or gorgeous sky, or ruddy sun, or the distant mountains, or the strong castle, or the gurgling stream, and her eyes were not sparkling as an affianced damsel's should, or joyful and calm, as a happy lover's, but there were tears oozing from between the lovely white fingers which concealed her face.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, as he approached, heard a voice, and listened for an instant. That voice was not Isabelle's. He heard the strange voice pronounce Isabelle's name. His face reddened, and in three strides he reached the cave.

There he found the Lady Isabelle, and on the ground by her side, a tall, handsome man, holding both the hands of the maiden, between his.

“Isabelle!” cried Sir Thomas, with a voice that caused both Isabelle and the man beside her to look up.

Isabelle sank on her knees, and the young man arose.

“Defend yourself!” he exclaimed, drawing his sword.

Sir Thomas calmly put the sword on one side with his hand, knelt down by Isabelle,

and in as gentle a tone as he could command, said—

“ Speak, Isabelle! What is it? Tell me what causes you to tremble, and appear so frightened?”

“ Coward! Defend yourself!” exclaimed the young man, wrathfully, “ am I so mean an animal that you take no heed of my words?”

“ What does all this mean, Isabelle?” again asked Fitzgerald.

“ Mean,” roared the youth, “ that you have stolen my love; and that nothing but your life will satisfy me!”

Hereupon, he struck Sir Thomas, who, rising slowly, drew his sword, and with the greatest coolness confronted the irate Pierre de Lacaze.

“ I will not fight with you. You are in

such an infernal rage. Who are you?" said Sir Thomas.

"I am Pierre de Lacaze," he replied, aiming another blow at Fitzgerald, which he parried. "Isabelle de Liancourt loves me!"

"Loves you!" shouted the Englishman.

"Yes, loves me; and shall be mine in spite of you."

Isabelle rose, and seized Pierre's arm.

Fitzgerald dropped the point of his sword, and said—

"Speak, Isabelle!" and he turned his eyes sorrowfully upon her.

Isabelle's fell beneath his, and the poor girl wept bitterly, as her head sank on her lover's shoulder.

Pierre supported her, and looking fiercely at Fitzgerald, cried—

"Renounce her!"

“ Isabelle, what does this mean ? ” again asked Fitzgerald.

Isabelle’s voice was scarcely audible, as she cried through her tears.

“ If you love me, I beseech you both to put up your swords.”

Fitzgerald’s was by his side instantly.

Pierre, however, became still more enraged, and despite Isabelle’s entreaties, cried—

“ English ruffian, renounce her ! She chooses poverty with me, rather than riches with such a one as you ! ” and again Pierre flourished his sword.

Fitzgerald took no notice of Pierre’s words, or his anger, but went close to Isabelle, saying kindly—

“ Will you give me an explanation of—”

“ No, Isabelle,” interrupted Pierre, “ my sword shall be the only explanation. It shall

never be sheathed till I force him to renounce you!"

Fitzgerald drew still nearer to the weeping, frightened Isabelle.

"Touch her not, English ruffian," shouted the ireful Pierre. "At your peril approach her not."

Despite the threat, Fitzgerald drew nearer to the weeping girl.

"You have taken advantage of her sorrow to win her from me," continued the more and more infuriated Pierre.

Sir Thomas, without heeding him, took Isabelle's hand, and was about to speak, looking fondly on her.

The wrathful Pierre, seeing this, without another word, his passion being worked up to the highest pitch, thrust his sword through Fitzgerald's arm, and was about to repeat the

deed, but Isabelle, screaming violently, warded off the blow, and whilst Sir Thomas coolly twisted his handkerchief round his arm, she prevailed on her headstrong lover to put up his sword and restrain his passion.

“Well, then, Isabelle,” he cried, “bid that Englishman never again to speak to you, or come near you from this moment. Choose between us.”

He paused, but receiving no answer from Isabelle, he continued—

“Choose between us. Am I, who have so fondly, so faithfully loved you, for so many years, to give you up to a stranger, and, above all, to an Englishman ? Speak!”

“Nonsense !” said Sir Thomas ; “I will speak with you to-morrow, when you are more calm. Adieu, dearest Isabelle ! Heaven bless and make you happy.”

Fitzgerald was deadly pale as he spoke. His moustache hid the convulsive movement of his lip. He cast one long and very sad look on Isabelle, and hurried off, leaving the fondly attached lovers together.

As he drew near the Castle his pace slackened, he sighed deeply, and compressing his lips, continued his walk, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground.

As he was about to enter the Castle gate, Isabelle de Liancourt's rosy-cheeked page came towards him, and after bowing respectfully, said—

“ *Seigneur Chevalier*, my mistress desires me to salute you in her name, and to tell you she will not be able to see you until early to-morrow morning.”

“ Eh?” replied the knight, looking up.

The page repeated his message.

“How long is it since your mistress despatched you with that message?”

The page blushed, saying—

“Two hours.”

“Two hours!” repeated Fitzgerald.

“Yes, Sir Thomas.”

“Why did you not deliver your mistress’s message sooner?”

“The truth is, *Seigneur*, I delayed on the road to—to—”

“To what?”

“To run races with a companion,” replied the little fellow, blushing.

“I have seen your mistress. Go,” said the knight; and off ran the rosy-cheeked page, delighted to escape a reprimand.

“Isabelle has acted badly towards me,” thought Fitzgerald, as he sought his room, and on his way noticed divers preparations going

on which sickened him. He sat down unheeding his wound."

"Love has, indeed, marred me. Must I give her up to that mad youth. It is quite evident she loves him. How she clung to him! How bitterly she wept."

CHAPTER IV.

FITZGERALD passed a restless night, and ere morning dawned had made up his mind what course to pursue. He found strength to conquer his feelings, and determined to carry out his intention without shrinking.

The first thing he did was to gallop over to De Briffault's castle, where he arrived in time for breakfast.

“ Oh ! oh ! my dear friend ! ” cried De Briffault, holding a huge cup of wine in his hand.

“Your good health, *mon brave!* Sit you down, sit you down, and eat, drink, and be merry.”

Fitzgerald took a seat.

“Well, my good friend,” continued De Briffault, “now let me hear what brings you here so early in the day, and how is thy peerless damsel, the Lady Isabelle?”

De Briffault emptied his cup, put it down, and resumed his knife and fork and began eating vigorously.

“I have only ridden over to see you,” said Fitzgerald.

“Oh! is that all?”

Fitzgerald made no further remark.

“What will you eat, Fitzgerald?” asked his friend Stephen, “something substantial after your ride?”

“I am not hungry.”

“Oh! I see,” laughed Stephen, “you will have something dainty and lover like?”

“ Anything you please.”

“ Good heaven! how pale you look,” exclaimed the good Dame de Briffault. “ What is the matter, my dear friend?”

“ Nothing,” replied Sir Thomas, looking straight at the dame, and helping himself in an absent style to an enormous piece of boar’s ham.

“ For a man who is not hungry,” laughed Stephen, “ that’s a nice little piece of ham.”

“ Upon my honour,” cried Marie, laughing heartily, “ you are very cruel to that poor ham.”

Fitzgerald smiled and asked for some wine.

“ Well, my friend, you have not answered my question. How is the *démoiselle* Isabelle de Liancourt?” asked De Briffault, in a stifled

voice, occasioned by the dainty replenishing of his mouth.

“ Quite well,” answered the knight, slowly draining his cup, and diligently hiding his face therewith.

“ I suppose,” said Marie, “ you have come to tell us you have put off your wedding for a month ?”

Fitzgerald nodded his head, and with difficulty smothered a sigh.

“ Ah !” said the sleek Dame de Briffault, “ you Englishmen are so cold.”

“ Young Frenchmen are more full of fire,” laughed Marie; “ they are tender.”

“ As this fowl,” laughed Stephen.

“ No, Master Stephen, they are alert, but you English are so frigid and slow.”

“ I think I was a little too hot and too

fast," laughed Stephen, looking tenderly at his beautiful young wife.

Fitzgerald only smiled at the sallies that met him on all sides, letting his French friends attribute his taciturnity to the style of an English lover.

Stephen, however, knew better. He saw that his friend was sad, and wondered what was the matter.

"Is it so difficult," said De Briffault, rising from the table and unbuttoning the two lower buttons of his doublet, "to tear yourself away, *mon brave*, from your lady love for one day?"

Sir Thomas returned a sickly smile, but made no reply.

"I am going to have an hour's hunting, and should be glad of your company. The fact is, my son-in-law, Stephen, knows no more

about horses and dogs than my riding whip. Besides, the foolish boy won't leave his wife. Come, say yes, and go home to the Lady Isabelle to-morrow."

"I am sorry I am obliged to refuse your kind offer," returned Fitzgerald, "but I have some matters of moment awaiting my return home, and—"

"Say no more, *mon brave*," said the fat De Briffault, "so just give me a helping hand to mount."

Fitzgerald assisted the burly De Briffault on to the back of a great, plump nag, as fat and round as himself, and was pleased when he saw him ride slowly away with his hunting train.

No sooner had De Briffault left the two friends than Stephen said—

"There is something wrong, Fitz, I can

tell by your countenance. Is there anything in which I can help you?"

"Yes," said his friend.

"How?"

"By giving me the day, and riding home with me without delay."

"I will just go and tell my wife," said Stephen, with a smile.

"And I'll order the horses to be got ready as quickly as possible."

In less than ten minutes the two friends left De Briffault's castle, and Sir Thomas was not long ere he increased the speed from a trot to a gallop—a pace not so agreeable to Stephen, who, as they could not converse, was thinking of "his beautiful Marie."

Very suddenly the knight pulled his horse up, and after smoothing down its mane and patting its neck, said—

“ Do you know anything of the house of De Lacaze, Stephen?”

“ I can’t say I do, and I can’t say I do not.”

“ What mean you ?”

“ Simply that I know nothing personally—but a good deal by report.”

“ Tell me what you know by report,” said the knight, taking off his cap and replacing it on one side his head.

“ Oh, they are an old ruined family ; their possessions all devastated, and poor as church mice,” replied Stephen.

“ Where do they live?”

“ Oh, here, there, and everywhere.”

“ Have they no fixed residence ?”

“ The eldest brother resides in a tumble-down old castle, and the other two live, as I said before, here there, and everywhere, first

taking service here and then there, to escape starvation."

"What kind of men are they?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Oh, they are good-looking fellows enough, and deserve a better fate."

"Do you know their names?"

"Yes, the eldest is Rogeord, and one of the other's is named Pierre, or some name like that."

"Are you sure Rogeord is older than the one named Pierre?"

"Yes, quite sure. What makes you so curious about them?"

"Are they friends of De Briffault."

"Friends of De Briffault?" repeated Stephen; "Yes."

"How long have they been friends?" asked Sir Thomas.

“Oh, long before we had the honour of my father-in-law’s acquaintance.”

“I imagine so.”

“He has done them many a kind act, and they have often served him well and truly.”

“Good,” said the knight.

“Now tell me why you seem so interested in their history?”

Fitzgerald related the adventures of the previous night.

“Aye! I thought something of the kind had taken place, Fitz; I could see it in your countenance,” said Stephen.

“De Briffault and the De Lacaze family, are they still on friendly terms?”

“Yes. But De Briffault was furious when he heard that Pierre loved a De Liancourt, and rejoiced when he heard how the father of Isabelle insulted him; turned him out of his

Castle, in fact, like a rogue and vagabond. Pierre was extremely liked by all his friends. However, it is two years since that insult was given."

"Did you not say De Briffault was still this Pierre's friend?" asked Sir Thomas, a little anxiously.

"Oh! firm as a rock. He and old Sir Rogeord were brothers-in-arms, and distant cousins as well."

"Then I am satisfied," said the knight, putting spurs to his horse, and urging the animal to his greatest speed, much to the discomfiture of his friend Stanley, who called hastily to his ally to slacken his speed. Sir Thomas, however, gave no heed to the appeal, and kept on the rapid pace till he came within a hundred yards of De Liancourt's Castle gate.

No sooner had they entered Fitzgerald's apartment than Stephen threw himself into an easy-chair, almost exhausted.

"Now, Stanley," said Sir Thomas, "I must beg your good offices and good French."

"What, this minute?" cried Stephen.

"No, I will not be so hard upon you," said the knight, with a smile, "take your rest first."

This was an offer Stephen never, for a moment, dreamt of refusing.

In somewhat less than half-an-hour, Sir Thomas had returned to the room, and asked his friend if he had had sufficient rest.

"Why, yes," said Stephen, sitting up and stretching out his arms and legs. "Now, Fitz, tell me what has been your purpose in bringing me here?"

"To assist me in a most delicate and difficult affair."

“What is it?”

“I will tell you,” replied his friend, and he related the whole of the occurrences of the previous day, and told him all he wished him to do and say.

“Think again, Fitz, before you go so far,” said Stephen, having listened patiently and with amazement to the knight’s details. “Remember, it is an easy matter to do, but once done, cannot be undone.”

“I have thought of all that.”

“Have you spoken to Isabelle?”

“No, I have not spoken a word, neither would I act until I had fully made up my mind. Come, let us be going.”

“Where to?”

“The Nunnery.”

“For what purpose?”

“To see Isabelle.”

The nunnery bell was rung, and Fitzgerald asked for the Dame de Liancourt. The meek old portress escorted them to the parlour, where they had the amusement of gazing on caricature martyrdoms and miraculous miracles, sundry small waxen images and tapestry, till the Dame de Liancourt walked slowly into the room and graciously curtsied.

For a short time Stephen Stanley and the Dame de Liancourt conversed with each other, Fitzgerald now and then putting in a word or two.

At length Sir Thomas said—

“Ask the Dame where Pierre is.”

“Sir Thomas is anxious to know where Pierre de Lacaze may be?” Stephen said, addressing the Dame de Liancourt.

“I am not certain, but I think Isabelle can tell.”

“Have the goodness to let the Demoiselle Isabelle be summoned.”

This was done, and the messenger soon returned stating that she had walked out with Pierre Lacaze.

Fitzgerald's countenance underwent a change, a frown passing over it.

A second messenger was dispatched in quest of the lovers, and in a few minutes they both came into the room.

Pierre, the moment his eye caught sight of the Englishman, looked defiantly at him, and began to breathe very fiercely, whilst his curly hair and beard seemed to curl more tightly and angrily about his head and face.

Sir Thomas, without heeding the looks of Pierre, turned his back upon him, and said to Stephen—

“Come, Stanley, get on.”

Stephen did as his friend bade him, and talked in smooth accents, and, as he talked, Isabelle began to weep, and Pierre to smile and kiss her hand, whilst his defiant looks gave place to those of pleasure and astonishment.

The Dame de Liancourt cast tender glances upon Sir Thomas and blessed him, as well as all present.

No sooner had Stephen finished his instructions than commenced a concert of weeping, blessings, talking, and vociferation, and, to the utter astonishment and discomfiture of Fitzgerald, the Lady de Liancourt took him by surprise, and threw herself into his arms, and Pierre wrung his hands, and called him a *preux chevalier*.

Sir Thomas, the moment he recovered from the sudden effusion on the part of the lady,

and putting away both the dame and Pierre, dashed out of the room, saying—

“They are as mad as March hares, by St. George !”

Stanley remained looking the astonishment he felt.

Fitzgerald, as he was passing through the entrance, called to Stephen—

“Come, Stanley, and bring that fellow, Pierre, with you.”

Stephen bowed one of his most courteous bows, first to the Dame de Liancourt, and then to Isabelle, and with the most polished words he bade them good-bye with due ceremony, each of the ladies extending their hand, which he shook respectfully.

Turning to Pierre, he said—

“Monsieur de Lacaze, will you do me the honour of accompanying me for a short time.

My friend, Sir Thomas, wishes to have a few words with you."

They found Sir Thomas standing, with arms *à la Napoleon*, outside the walls of the nunnery.

Pierre talked and laughed all the way to the Castle, and seemed smitten with a mighty affection for Sir Thomas.

CHAPTER V.

THE sun was setting when Stanley, with a thoughtful countenance, rode from the Castle gates, and the night was very dark, when Sir Thomas, in full armour, mounted on his charger, and followed by a squire, carrying his small stock of baggage, did the same.

The men at the Castle gate opened their eyes in utter astonishment as they saw the knight depart.

Pierre de Lacaze was laughing in his sleep

in the best bed in the Castle; and two men-at-arms, who had been called into Sir Thomas's room, just before Stephen Stanley left, were still conferring on what had there passed, ending by saying—

“ We must not fail in keeping the secret till Thursday.”

The clang of Sir Thomas's arms died away from the ears of the men-at-arms, and the next day he was many a long mile from his newly acquired property.

Then came Thursday, *the Thursday* on which poor Sir Thomas had anticipated so much happiness. The Castle was full of life and bustle, and Pierre de Lacaze as full of life and bustle as the Castle, his eyes sparkling, his cheeks flushed, and almost beside himself with joy.

“ Upon my word, I think that *bon Anglais*

must be a little cracked in the upper story," he said, as he rubbed his hands, cut a caper, and told himself he should be rich, great, and a happy lover, thanks to the generosity of another man.

Meanwhile the household wondered at the absence of the English bridegroom.

"It's very strange," said one, "Sir Thomas does not make his appearance."

"Oh! I suppose he will come with De Briffault," said another.

De Briffault came. Stephen Stanley rode by his side, looking exceedingly melancholy, whereat his gay father-in-law was very much surprised.

"What makes you so taciturn, my good little son-in-law?" asked De Briffault. "Has marriage so saddened you that you are fearing for the fate of your friend?"

Stephen made no reply, and De Briffault went on in a bantering strain—

“ Come, cheer up ; let me see a smile and sunshine upon your face, instead of the gloomy cloud.”

“ You will know in a very short time,” said Stephen, shaking his head, “ what it is that causes my taciturnity, as you are pleased to call it.”

At the entrance of the hall Pierre de Lacaze met them.

“ Aha !” cried De Briffault, “ my good friend de Lacaze. What has brought you to the Castle ?”

Pierre made no reply.

“ *Diable !* How is it ? I don’t understand. Where is Sir Thomas Fitzgerald ? I cannot understand.”

“ I shall have the honour of explaining ?” said Pierre, bowing ; and giving his hand to the Dame de Briffault, he led her in, whilst a look of malicious triumph shone in his eyes, and a corresponding smile cast an unpleasant air over his handsome countenance.

He did explain, and his explanation revealed that Sir Thomas Fitzgerald had given castle, lands, everything to his rival.

“ On what conditions,” asked De Briffault, “ has he done all this ?”

“ That I should marry Isabelle de Lian-court this day.”

“ What !” exclaimed De Briffault, “ on the very day fixed for his own wedding with the demoiselle ?”

“ Yes.”

“ What other conditions ?”

“ That I should for ever remain the firm ally of the house of De Briffault,” returned Pierre Lacaze.

“ And you have sworn to comply with Sir Thomas Fitzgerald’s conditions?” demanded the astonished De Briffault.

“ Yes, and I before you solemnly swear that I will fulfil them to the best of my abilities,” said Pierre.

“ Did Sir Thomas require you to sign any documents?”

“ Yes,” put in Stephen Stanley, “ I was requested to draw up a paper to the same effect as De Lacaze has stated, which paper has been signed by Pierre de Lacaze, in the presence of myself, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, and two men-at-arms, and unto which the mark of Sir Thomas and the seals of Fitzgerald and

De Lacaze, as well as my own seal and signature have been appended."

"And here it is," said Pierre, producing the document, "and I most solemnly swear that nothing shall ever detach me from the house of De Briffault."

De Briffault opened his eyes and rubbed his fat chin.

"I have heard," he said, "of the noble deeds of knights towards ladies, and have witnessed a few; but I never saw nor heard of one act so noble as this. That Englishman is a good knight at heart. Poor fellow! I grieve for his loss," and the usually merry knight actually looked sad; but after a pause, brightening up again, he added, "Well, it can't be helped; so now for the wedding. One bridegroom must do as well as another.

Come, let us be going, and I warrant we will drink Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's health till we make the walls of the castle shake. *Allons, mes amis ! Le pauvre Anglais !*"

"He is both noble and generous," said Pierre De Lacaze, graciously smiling.

"Yes," said Stephen, "he is more—he is the very soul of honour, and what is not often found, a true friend."

"He is a fool," thought Pierre, but he did not give utterance to his thoughts.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ceremony ended—the festivities ended—the guests departed, and Isabelle De Liancourt was established in the castle of the De Liancourts, as the wife of the man she loved, and everything promised happiness.

The generous cause of her happiness was travelling calmly about the land, giving some regrets at losing her, yet trying to bring his mind to the right temper for forgetting her, by dwelling as much as possible on the present and the future.

“Here I am,” he thought. “Love has again marred me. In the future I will sturdily ignore this said love. Once again I am houseless, and almost friendless. No, not friendless; Stephen Stanley is, as he has ever been, and ever will be, my true friend,” and he gave a sigh of regret at being parted from his firm ally.

“I have a good arm and a strong body,” he continued, “and it behoves me to seek my fortune and win a wide-world name. I will forget the past, and live a knight errant till I can find good service with some valiant lord.”

Following this high resolve, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald journeyed hither and thither. If there came in his way a wrong to be redressed, that wrong he made it his business to redress. If he heard of a tournament, to that tourna-

ment he would repair, conquer, and take ransom for his conquests, as other penniless knights were in the habit of doing.

But other knights, penniless or wealthy, had each his lady, and for her he did great deeds, and swung round his mace or battle-axe, broke bones, took life, gave and received wounds, vanquished others, or was himself beaten, all according to the fortune of war.

Fitzgerald went through all this without any lady whatever to cheer him on, or to console him under reverses, till at length he became known far and near about the land as a valiant man, as strong as Hercules, and as invincible, but as a man to be compared to a body without a soul, a plant without flowers, a harp without strings, an arm without a hand, a steed without a rider—in short, a knight without a lady; thereby he acquired

and was known by the name of the “lady hater.”

Now it was entirely his own fault that such a name was affixed to him. Many beautiful eyes had looked on him with favour, many a fair young girl had sighed for him, and encouraged him to sigh in return—as far as a virtuous girl might. Sir Thomas, however thought of the prophecy, and ensconced himself in a species of mental armour, with the vizor down, and defied the charms about him, ungallantly suffered not his eyes to encounter ladies’ glances, and so passed unhurt by them.

Many a wandering knight had Sir Thomas met, all fire and flame, who planting himself before him, would defy him to pronounce his lady the fairest.

“I have no lady,” Sir Thomas would reply,

“ and I'll be sworn yours is as ugly and ungainly as yourself. Nevertheless I will battle with you all the same. By St. George! come on ! ”

So the knights would fight like madmen, as they were, and Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, in spite of having no lady-love, almost in every conflict came off victorious.

Thirty years had passed over his head, and during that time he had more than once visited his native land. Italy, too, and Spain he had traversed, and once again, as summer had passed, and autumn was dying out, he embarked for England.

As we have said, he embarked for England, but he did not embark alone. He had a train of brother knights with him. He had an enterprise in view. His knights were both French and English, all anxious to en-

gage in any wild exploit likely to bring either fame or wealth.

Need it be said that this adventure was undertaken to chastise Lord Bruce, not for the gross injustice done to himself, but for the purpose of punishing him and his son for the cruel and dastardly murder of his beloved father, committed by the latter, and, if possible, to recover the lost property of his ancestors.

This last idea was rather visionary, for he was too well aware, that should he recover it, he was too poor to retain the possession.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald had not only gained fame by his exploits, but had made numerous friends among his fellow knights, and after a splendid tournament, at which he had gained immense fame, he caused his expedition to be proclaimed, inviting all knights who abhorred injustice and tyranny, to join their swords

to his to avenge his father's murder, and his own wrongs and indignities.

Sir Thomas must not be thought a monster of vengeance and malignity in pursuing the proposed course, for be it remembered, he had been brought up to think it a very meritorious undertaking.

Fitzgerald's name was well known in England, for he had performed many chivalrous acts which had gained for him a high and deserved reputation, and he now fondly hoped, after his long wanderings in Spain, in France, and in Italy, to live and die in his own country, and serve her well with honour and credit to himself.

From that part of the coast on which he and his brother knights landed, it was not more than two days' journey to Lord Bruce's stronghold, or, we should rather say, nest of pride

and arrogance, and it was with no slight degree of glee and anticipated glory that Sir Thomas Fitzgerald and his friends set out to seek it.

Sir Thomas's heart felt sorrowful as he espied in the distance his native downs, and thought of the happy hours he had spent in his boyhood in riding over and playing upon those widespread uplands. He had seen many lands since then, and had travelled far and wide, had fought often, and bled often, had been a partaker in many an adventure since that dark night, when, after burying his father, he had left those same downs, poor, friendless, and in deep sorrow.

“I am poor enough now,” he thought, “but I care very little for riches. They are as nothing compared with my honour. I must wipe out the blow, the dastardly blow I re-

ceived from Lord William Bruce. After I have done that, I will bury my father's remains in a grave worthy of him. He now lies in unhallowed ground, a murdered victim to the wickedness and pride of that proudest of all proud families. I can see him now, as I saw him in that moonlight night, his bosom gashed and bleeding ; his strong right arm, that had never been lifted to do an unworthy act, cut off, his face looking so pale, stern, and rigid, as he lay helpless at my feet.

The knight sighed heavily as these thoughts crossed his mind, and his mental picture was obscure for a few moments.

“ Lord William Bruce,” he again thought, “ you shall atone for your barbarous cruelty with your blood !”

The night of the second day was passed in the village about two miles distant from Lord

Bruce's abode. The following day Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's supporters, making a glittering array, rode after him, full of spirits and full of ardour, and on seeing the lofty towered castle, a shout of joy, if not of defiance, arose from their ranks.

“There,” said Fitzgerald, “is the nest of my enemies, a family of tyrants, amongst whom is the murderer of my father. Will you help me to avenge my father’s death and punish those tyrants?”

“We are ready to die for you, and to dismantle that nest of vipers,” cried all his English friends.

“Brave Sir Thomas,” shouted the French, “your wrongs are our wrongs, and we will spill the last drop of blood in avenging the wrongs and insults you have received. To victory! Come on!”

Sir Thomas begged them to restrain their ardour, thanking both the French and English, saying—

“I trust my friends, there will be no need for your dying, for I hope Lord William Bruce will accept my challenge, which I wish four knights, with their esquires, to convey to him.”

All the knights were anxious to testify their loyalty to their leader, but after a short consultation, two French and two English were selected, who trotted off, with their esquires, to carry the challenge to Lord William Bruce.

They chatted up to the very gateway, the tower of which was crowded with men, among whom stood Lord William himself. He was a tall, robust young man, with a fair, ruddy complexion, good features, red hair and beard,

piercing grey eyes, and a most proud, haughty and overbearing manner.

Sir Charles Banbury, the knight who bore the challenge, advanced in front of his brother knights, followed by his esquire, carrying his shield. His splendid horse arched its neck and pawed the ground, and its breath seemed as if flame was to follow as it spread in the clear frosty, autumn air.

“I come,” said Sir Charles Banbury, in a loud, clear voice, “to challenge you, Lord William Bruce, to fight with Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, a brave and true knight, with lance, with sword, and with battle-axe, with one or all, till one of you shall be slain. And I hereunto challenge you, in vengeance for Sir James Fitzgerald, who you savagely and inhumanly murdered.

“Furthermore, I challenge you, Lord Wil-

liam Bruce, in the name of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, so that he may wipe out all the insults you put upon him when he was not in a position to defend himself, and in token thereof I defy you by throwing down this gauntlet."

Therewith he cast the gauntlet on the ground. Presently the bridge was lowered, the gates opened, and a herald rode forth on a high spirited horse, followed by several knights and esquires.

The herald accepted the challenge in Lord William Bruce's name, and an esquire picked up the gauntlet.

"At what hour will Lord William Bruce be ready to meet Sir Thomas Fitzgerald?" demanded Sir Charles Banbury.

"In an hour from this time," replied the herald.

"Good!" said Sir Charles, and wheeling

his horse round, he and his esquire rode back to the other knights.

The challenge and its acceptance caused great dismay in the castle. Lord William Pruce was an only son.

“Is there no way by which this combat may be avoided?” asked the father.

“None,” replied the son.

“I do not like your risking your life in such a cause,” continued the father.

“Fight, I must,” returned Lord William.

“Curses be on the head of that insolent, presuming Fitzgerald,” cried the haughty mother, weeping bitter tears.

Bertha, the cause of all, was not there. She had married a bold Baron, who had long sighed for her, some few months after Sir Thomas Fitzgerald had been so roughly and so ignominiously driven from her father’s castle.

The younger sister, Justine, soon after

followed Bertha's example, and the two proud, overbearing sisters were now two equally proud and overbearing Baronesses.

The hour had nearly passed. Lord William was completely armed, with the exception of his head-piece. In the interim he had in haste confessed to a priest.

A page came to summon Sir William to his mother.

“Tell Lady Bruce,” he said, “I cannot attend. She shall see me when I return covered with the blood of that insolent beggar, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, whose head I will shortly place at her feet!”

His squire finished arming him. He mounted his charger, and, accompanied by an armed *cortège*, in numbers fully equal, if not more numerous, than those of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, rode out of the castle gate.

The walls were filled with the remaining

part of the garrison, whilst Lord and Lady Bruce, with their numerous attendants, both male and female, occupied the whole of the gateway tower.

The ground had been measured—all preliminaries were arranged. The morning sun was brightly shining on the yet dewy grass, the flashing arms of the assembled knights, whose plumes nodded gracefully in the soft breeze; the skylark, too, sang loud and clear above them, knowing little in its heavenward flight of the passions and quarrels of the men beneath.

The place selected for the deadly combat was a flat, grassy plain, extending for half a mile or more in front of the castle. The combatants took their places; their attendant corps stood at each end of the ground. Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's were ranged three

deep ; Lord William Bruce's extended in one long line.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald had gone to confession that morning early, and was in the act of closing his vizor when one of his French knights addressing him said—

“ Oh ! Sir Thomas, how unfortunate that you have not a lady to whose prayers to commend yourself.”

“ My good friend,” replied Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, drawing his rein, “ in this instance I have that which will spur me on more than a thousand ladies !”

“ *Ma foi !* What can that be ?” cried the knight, with astonishment.

“ The bloody murder of the very best of fathers !”

Without further parley, Sir Thomas took his place, whilst Lord William Bruce trotted up

to his. They were each armed with a lance, and a sword ; a battle-axe, heavy and sharp, hung at the saddle bow of each.

The skylark's merry, innocent, ringing song was drowned by a loud flourish of trumpets. A prolonged shout arose from all on the plain as the two noble-looking chargers bore their masters furiously against each other.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, arrayed in a simple steel suit, surmounted by a white feather, was mounted on a coal-black steed, very simply caparisoned knight and horse, contrasting well with Lord William Bruce's armour, which was one mass of gilding, velvet, and gold, whilst his cream-coloured charger, having a splendid blue plume on his head, was not in the slightest degree behind its rider in the magnificence of its trappings.

Lord and Lady Bruce kept a dignified

silence as their son drew near his foe; but in their hearts they supplicated all the saints to make him victorious.

As the two knights met, Lord William's horse swerved, and his lance in consequence went wide of Sir Thomas's shield, whilst Fitzgerald's, hitting full on the cuirass which defended Lord William's breast, was shattered in pieces.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald wheeled round his horse, and drawing his sword called on his foe to do the like. Immediately the two swords glistened in the sun, and the heavy blows were heard to ring on the armour, whilst the blades clashed against each other with almost incredible celerity.

Murmurs rose from the friends and adherents of the two knights, and each side cheered as the leader thereof made a good hit.

Horses and men seemed but one, guided by one spirit, so well did the black and cream-colour steeds second their riders' efforts.

The knights were well matched, and it was for some time doubtful which would prove victorious. Lord William's sword was the best tempered. Sir Thomas's, after many a hard thrust, broke, and left only the hilt in his hand. This he tossed high in the air, shouting—

“Now for the battle axes,” at the same time clutching his.

Lord William Bruce, amidst the vociferous cheers of his followers, armed himself in like manner.

Then the blows became heavier and far more serious. Lord William's glorious plume and crest were hacked off, and remorselessly trampled beneath the feet of the horses.

The hard breathing of the combatants became deep, and their eyes gleamed fiercely through their vizors; horse touching horse. The heavy battle-axes of both were swung round, each knight being determined the other should die. Their arms seemed to gather strength as they fought, and even the cool Sir Thomas Fitzgerald felt the rage of a tiger as he remembered his father, and dealt blow after blow on his heartless, cold-blooded murderer.

The snorting horses, too, seemed animated with the rage and excited feelings of their riders. They reared and plunged, fire flashing from their eyes; they showed their white teeth, and tore each other savagely as their lords fought. Both the combatants felt they had lost the command of them; but the enraged animals thought not of parting, and

thus allowed their masters a good opportunity to finish their fight of death.

Now the knights grappled with each other amidst the shouts and words of encouragement thundered forth by each of their partisans. Sir Thomas Fitzgerald seized his antagonist by his sword belt, and swinging round his battle axe dealt a murderous blow. The black steed fell. Lord William Bruce's charger, neighing loud, reared over him. Lord Bruce's axe was raised to fall in a heavy blow, which Sir Thomas evaded, at the same moment sticking his spurs deep into his horse's sides, which caused the ferocious animal to plunge and dash with frightful rage at its foe, whilst Sir Thomas, swaying his axe twice round his head, rose in his stirrups, and with both hands let it fall, with good aim on Lord William, who, unprepared for his oppon-

ent's sudden recovery, parried it unskilfully. The tremendous blow from the heavy axe fell ringing on the helmet, cutting it through, and smote Lord William's skull in twain.

“My father is avenged!” shouted Sir Thomas, as Lord William, with a deep groan fell to the ground.

The dead knight's steed, terrified by his fall, roared and plunged ferociously, and whilst Fitzgerald, using bit and spur, got his own under control, Lord William's dashed over the plain, dragging his dead master bounding by his side.

Lady Bruce, who until now had never uttered a word, fainted at this fearful sight, and was carried lifeless to her own apartment.

Sir Thomas rejoined his friends, and was received by them with loud and prolonged cheers.

Lord William Bruce's esquire, as soon as he recovered from his astonishment, shouted vehemently—

“Vengeance! Vengeance! At them, my lads,” and putting spurs to his horse, led Lord William's men full gallop to the charge.

“Look! look! Sir Thomas,” screamed a young French knight, striking Fitzgerald's shoulder to gain his attention, as the long, glittering line of men-at-arms came full tear towards them.

“Charge! For St. George and Fitzgerald!” shouted Sir Thomas, and instantly led on his men, as if he had had no previous exertion.

The two hostile forces met, and Fitzgerald's train broke through the middle of the long line. The wings passed on, and wheeling round,

formed two deep, to attack Sir Thomas in the rear.

“Face about!” cried Fitzgerald.

The order was instantly obeyed, and again the rival forces rushed furiously against each other. Men and horses rolled on the earth. Blows rang loud on the armour, whilst curses and groans, uttered by both the French and English, rose towards the peaceful blue sky, the sun shining calmly and unclouded on the knot of infuriated beings struggling who should first take the life of his fellow man.

Sir Thomas had the advantage. In the first charge only two of his people had fallen, whilst nearly every man, save the wings of the long line of his opponents had been overthrown. He had but to face about and to dash on the enemy before he was well formed to oppose him, had again passed clean through

his line, and then coming to close quarters, his superiority of numbers told.

Lord William's steed had dashed into the *mêlée*, dragging his lacerated and battered master with him; and, receiving a death-blow, fell, crushing Lord William's disfigured body beneath him.

Lord Bruce's men began to scud across the plain towards the Castle, pursued by Fitzgerald's knights. The small body that had remained in the Castle were pouring forth to the rescue of their companions, but were borne back by the fugitives and their pursuers, and all in the greatest disorder clattered over the drawbridge. Some fell on either side, both men and horses tumbling into the moat, whilst the rest dashed into the spacious court-yard of the Castle.

“Raise the drawbridge,” shouted Lord

Bruce; but it was vain to attempt it, so burdened was it.

Friends and foes met and fought within the Castle walls, leaving both dead and wounded to lie unheeded on the plain.

Some of Fitzgerald's party, dismounting, rushed into the large hall, sword in hand, and seizing the carved benches, piled them close to the wainscotted wall, and putting a quantity of hay beneath, set fire thereto, and kept guard over it.

Lord Bruce and a small number of his men rushed upon them to drive them off, and prevent the destruction of the place. The fight was fierce around the quickly rising, crackling flames.

Man wrestled with man, sword clashed against sword; Lord Bruce fought like a lion. Some fell against the burning pile of benches,

which had fallen on the paved floor. The inhabitants of the Castle stamped upon them to extinguish their fire, whilst the others attempted to repulse them, rolling over each other in the fierce struggle.

Some of Fitzgerald's men seized the burning fragments, and tossed them among the time-dried rafters of the hall. The wainscoting was already crackling, and on fire. Black smoke rolled slowly over their heads, and flames, showing pale in the daylight and sun's rays, roared and sent forth their long licking tongues of fire, igniting more and more as they arose.

They had done their work, and again Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's people rushed out. Some of the French knights were throwing as many of their enemies as they could catch

down a deep well. Every now and then a shriek was heard therefrom, followed by a hollow, echoing splash.

In vain, Fitzgerald, by threats and blows, endeavoured to put a stop to the massacre. His followers were like wild beasts that had tasted blood. They had lost all control over their feelings; nothing could stop them.

Lord Bruce was bound hands and feet, and cast into the stable beneath a manger, and two esquires were placed to watch him, and prevent his escape.

The flames, roaring, devoured their prey. The large stained glass window in the hall fell, shivered to a thousand fragments. Fire had been applied to every tower in the building; it entirely surrounded Lady Bruce's apartments. She was still insensible, despite

the noise and heat. Her attendant women had not dared go forth, fearing the enraged assailants.

It was not till all retreat was cut off that some ventured to try to escape. They were driven back in despair. Wherever they turned they were met by the devastating flames. Some fainted, others in deepest despair dashed themselves from the narrow windows, only to be crushed on the hard stones of the court beneath.

The floor grew hot under their feet, and a flickering flame made its way through its crevices. With a loud and fearful shriek, such as retained their senses hid their faces, and rushed from the room. There were some twelve or fourteen feet of stone work at a distance from the door, and beyond that a

frightful gulf of thick smoke and flame, making it difficult for them to breathe.

At this moment, Lady Bruce opened her eyes and looked around. The sobs and screams of her women smote her ears. Light was darkened by the smoke and flames issuing from the floor.

“Where am I?” shrieked the proud woman in despair, throwing herself from the bed on which she had been placed. “Am I—am I—”

That shriek was her last, for the same moment the burning floor fell in, and every human being in the apartment was precipitated, to be destroyed, into the burning chaos beneath.

The fight was over. Dark night came on. The inhabitants of the Castle that had es-

caped being slaughtered gave themselves up to the conquerors. Here and there the flames still burnt. The victors had searched for treasure in vain. The devouring element had destroyed gold and silver, gems and fine clothing—nothing was spared.

From the cellars, however, the conquerors rolled casks of good wine, and had found, as well, a large supply of provisions. They sat by the light of torches, among the ruins, and regaled themselves, eating and drinking till they forgot their previous toil.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald ate in silence. His father was avenged, but his heart was sad at the wide-spread ruin which surrounded him.

“I would have spared this Castle,” he thought, “this burnt and blackened pile in which I passed so many happy years of

my youth; where I was taught good lessons in chivalry by Lord Bruce, who is now lying beneath a manger, bound hand and foot. I would—”

His thoughts were interrupted by a knight addressing one of his companions near him—

“Our next duty will be to dispose of the Lord of the Castle.”

“He must be degraded for a tyrant,” said the man addressed.

“Best hang him over his own castle gate,” said another.

“Or, to save trouble, send him head foremost down the well to look after his retainers,” said a third.

“No, no. That will not answer our purpose,” said Sir Charles Banbury. “He must be degraded. Hanging him over his castle wall will do best. What say you, Fitzgerald?”

“ By far the best way, Sir Charles,” returned the knight.

“ Then let the tyrant be brought forth at once,” said Sir Charles.

“ No, no,” said Fitzgerald. “ Let it be done in the full glare of the sun.”

“ Aye, aye, by all means,” shouted another, “ by broad daylight.”

“ Come, then, Banbury ! pass round the wine,” said Fitzgerald. “ Let’s be merry now ; to-morrow, the proud, haughty old Baron shall die the death he deserves.”

“ *Bon repos à Milor Bruce !* ” laughed a French knight, tossing off his wine.

“ And a good voyage to my Lord of the Castle to-morrow ! ” cried a second, following the example of the first speaker, by emptying his cup.

“We will do him full honour,” said another, “his pride shall be exalted.”

“Yes. He shall be raised nearer to Heaven than he ever has been before on earth,” said the speaker.

“Fair and softly, my good friends,” said Fitzgerald to himself. “If I die for it I will save Lord Bruce. His son it was who murdered my father and put indignities upon me. He is dead and crushed on the plain.”

“Come, Fitzgerald,” cried Sir Charles Banbury, “the wine stands with you. Are you thinking of any better mode of sending the tyrant to the other world than hanging him?”

“No,” replied Fitzgerald. “I was thinking more about the son than the father.”

“Well, you gave him a *quietus* in the

most knight-like style. Come, my men, let's drink Fitzgerald's health!"

This was instantly assented to, and the wine cups filled to the brim.

"Fitzgerald, your health!" resounded on all sides.

Sir Thomas thanked them and again relapsed into silence.

By degrees one well fed man after another fell soundly to sleep, till Fitzgerald perceived he was the only one awake.

Taking a lighted torch, the knight arose and left the sleepers to their dreams. He walked towards the stables. He looked round him, sorrowing at the ruin and havoc. Hot embers gleamed here and there through the blackness of the night, and the noble pile of buildings, which that morning had looked so grand, was utterly destroyed, never again to

give shelter to a human being, to become a support for ivy and nettles, the abiding place of owl and bat, a comely ruin, a haunted spot.

He reached the stable. The men placed as guards had stolen off. Fitzgerald pushed the door with his foot. It opened. The stable was empty.

“By George! he’s off, and has robbed me of the pleasure of saving him. I’ll say nothing about it, and give the old lord a fair start for his life.”

The thoroughly wearied knight gathered together a quantity of hay, extinguished his torch, and casting himself down on his fragrant bed, his sonorous snores soon bore testimony to his refreshing and profound repose.

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT morning's dawn witnessed the fresh turned up mould, as a vast trench was dug in which were placed, despoiled of arms and glitter, the naked and clay-cold victims of the previous day's fight. The brown earth soon hid them from the light of heaven, and the living applied themselves again to their work of life.

Fitzgerald took no spoil to himself. Horses

and arms were divided among his allies, and it was a merry time with them, though an occasional quarrel would spring up as they parted, exchanged, or sold the loot among themselves.

The blackened ruin was left to its first day of silence and solitude. The destroyers thereof rode off laughing, and joyous, nor cast one look back at their work of destruction.

Sir Thomas still led them, and they did not halt till they drew their reins at the gate of a monastery, which stood about a mile from Fitzgerald's paternal Tower.

The bell was rung. Forth stepped the porter. Then one shorn monk peeped out, and then another, and lastly came the pleasant-looking Abbot.

“What want you, sir knights?” asked the Abbot.

“ Your blessing,” said Sir Thomas, leaping from his horse.

“ I know the voice,” said the godly man ; “ who are you ? ”

“ Thomas Fitzgerald.”

“ Thomas Fitzgerald ! ” repeated the Abbot, in evident surprise, “ the son of my worthy friend Sir James Fitzgerald, the former owner of yonder Tower ? ”

“ Yes,” said the knight.

“ Then I will bless you with all my heart,” cried the Abbot, taking hold of Sir Thomas by the arm, and leading him into the monastery.

“ My companions—” began Sir Thomas.

“ Oh ! ” said the Abbot, turning to the knights, “ you are all welcome, please follow us.”

No sooner was the invitation given, than it was succeeded by a great dismounting and clattering of arms, the leading in of men and horses, and making acquaintance—which, in those days, was soon accomplished amongst knights and friars—and in a few minutes little knots of steel and brown serge, of plumed heads and hooded heads, of curly pates and shorn pates, were to be seen dotted about hither and thither, whilst Sir Thomas and the Abbot, in the most retired avenue of the garden, walked and talked apart.

“Ahem!” coughed the Abbot behind his hand, “you have had many risks and riots in your career, Sir Thomas.”

“A few,” replied the knight.

“Whilst I have had a very peaceful life—ahem!”

“No doubt,” returned the knight.

“Ahem!” coughed the Abbot, as if unwilling to speak again.

“Now, my good friend, can you help me in this matter?”

“What, in burying your father in the chapel?” asked the Abbot.

“Yes.”

“I both can and will help you,” said the kind-hearted Abbot.

“To-morrow?” asked Fitzgerald.

“Aye, to-morrow,” replied the Abbot. “Disinter him this evening, and we will bury him with all pomp to-morrow. Yes—yes,” he continued, tapping the knuckles of one hand deliberately with the other, and then rubbing caressingly his shining bald head. “Yes—yes—we can do it all—but—but—”

“But what?” asked the knight.

“I am sorry—I fear—I fear—” replied the Abbot, with hesitation.

“Fear what?”

“That you were wrong, my good friend, to take such desperate revenge.”

“What revenge could be too great for the son to take upon the vile, cold-blooded murderer of his father!” exclaimed Sir Thomas, considerably excited.

“True—true. I know you knights count it only as a point of honour, and—”

“In my case a point of duty as well,” said Sir Thomas.

“Ahem! no doubt. Still, I fear it will bring you into trouble.”

“How? Why? How can it hurt me? What’s to come of it, eh?”

“Ah! Sir Thomas; you have not dwelt at Court,” said the Abbot.

“ No. What then ?”

“ You have yet to learn the branchings and bearings of the Court.”

“ I have no desire to learn them. What have I to do with the branchings and bearings of the Court ?”

“ Just this, my dear friend. Lord Bruce is the firm ally and sworn chum of our good king’s favourite. That’s all,” said the Abbot, looking remarkably clever and wagging his head significantly.

Fitzgerald was silent a few minutes ere he spoke again.

“ So you think Lord Bruce will get assistance from his friend ?”

“ Ahem !”

“ And that his friend will tell his story at Court.”

“ Ahem !”

“ And that I may be pushed to the wall?” continued Fitzgerald.

“ Just so—just so—that’s just it—that’s just it,” exclaimed the Abbot, rubbing his bald pate.

“ Well, so be it,” replied Fitzgerald. “ I can’t help it, and we must see what turns up, my good friend.”

* * * * *

Sir Thomas, at the head of a few monks, once more stood in the wood, and searched for his father’s grave. He had passed the Tower, the home of his infancy and his childhood. There it stood as in former days, when his father guided his young years. There it stood among the rounded downs. The sun shone as in other days on the battlemented walls, and the cawing rooks were flying over it, and the thyme was smelling sweetly all

around, and the light, healthy breeze sweeping as merrily along, as when little Thomas Fitzgerald lived there in the happiness and brightness of childhood !

Sir Thomas sighed, shook his head, and plunged into the wood.

That night the bones of Sir James Fitzgerald reposed in the choir of the chapel, watched by monks in white surplices, who chanted a service in low sepulchral tones throughout the entire night.

Sir Thomas, too, sat silent at the coffin head, and watched his father's remains, whilst thoughts of the past as well as of the future crowded through his busy mind.

Then followed the mass, the innumerable tall tapers, the incense, the rich funereal vestments, the armed knights, and in their midst

Sir Thomas stood with folded hands and downcast eyes at the head of the damp and darkly gaping vault, and witnessed the mortal remains of his sire deposited therein ; and in a few minutes the rich chapel was silent and deserted, and a sacristan extinguished one by one the pale tapers, and Sir Thomas prayed in a cell alone, and his heart felt lighter as he thought his duty towards his slain father was now fully and faithfully accomplished.

Then, too, he dismissed his gallant friends with many thanks for their good services, and vows to serve them in his turn ; and they left him and went each man his way in search of other deeds to do.

Sir Thomas placed on the Abbot's table the gold he had hoarded for masses for his

father's soul. The Abbot shook his head, pushed it back, protesting he would have none of it from his old friend's son.

"By St. George! you must take it," said the knight, resolutely, pushing it again towards the good Abbot.

"I'll be—," cried the Abbot, who just stopped himself in time to prevent what would have been very unseemly in an abbot, —swearing.

"I shall never rest unless you take it," said Fitzgerald.

"Then, my good friend, I will take half for the good of the monastery."

"Well, so be it," assented the knight.

"And now, my good friend, Sir Thomas, what do you purpose doing? what do you purpose, eh?"

“ By St. George! I have never given the matter a thought.”

“ Umph! Well, let us see. What say you to taking up your quarters in the monastery for a while?”

Sir Thomas made no reply.

“ Yes, and enjoy the calm and peace of our life here, after all your toilings and fightings and wanderings. You will grow fat, and learn content among us!”

“ Do you think, my worthy friend,” said Sir Thomas, with a smile at the Abbot’s conceit, “ that is the life a knight should lead?”

“ Ahem!”

“ A knight should be active, warlike, without repose; and to get fat—it would be a disgrace to him.”

“ Ahem!”

And the portly abbot winced a little at this latter remark.

“However,” continued Sir Thomas, “I thank you most heartily from my heart, and will abide with you for a time.”

“That’s right—that’s right!” cried the Abbot, stroking his bald head.

So a week went past, and Sir Thomas Fitzgerald’s steed munched hay in the monastery stable, whilst his master led a peaceful idle life, and bethought himself that in his old age he might find that same monastery a haven of rest from war and turmoil, and when disabled from fight he might there wear out, in peace and comfort, the remnant of his days, provided swords, and lances, and battle-axes, and other chances of war suffered him to live so long.

“However, that is for after years,” he

thought, as he sat in a sunny nook in the cloisters, with his cap over his eyes and his arms idly folded, whilst the huge mastiff of the monastery yawned wide and scratched his ears with his paw, and then cast himself on the ground to sleep.

“I have more work before me yet,” he continued, taking up the train of thought. “I will make England the scene of my future exploits, and traverse it from north to south, from east to west, in search of deeds on which to exercise my arm and sword.”

Again the knight relapsed into a dreamy state.

After a lengthened pause, he a second time continued his soliloquy—

“Yes, I’ll have one more week of this soft life, and then I’ll start again like a good knight and true.”

At this moment his thoughts and the sleep of the mastiff were disturbed. A loud and clanging ringing at the monastery bell was answered by the equally loud deep bark of the dog, as he flew towards the gate, and there came to a stand, barking vehemently, and wagging his tail.

The porter peered through the grating in the heavy doors to see who it was that caused the din, which was renewed again with the accompaniment of kicks and knocks.

Sir Thomas remained pacing the cloisters, and presently the Abbot and two monks came towards him as quickly as they could, carrying a loaf, some dried fish, and a couple of bottles of wine.

“Come, Sir Thomas, come along with us?” cried the Abbot, breathing heavily with the great exertion he had used.

“What’s the matter?” asked the knight, in some surprise.

“There’s no time for explanation. Come along, man. Don’t you hear them thundering at the door?” cried the Abbot.

“Who is there?”

“Come along.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Why, Lord Bruce and a host of the king’s people have come to search for you. Make haste!”

The Abbot hurried on, Sir Thomas and the monk following him, talking the while as they went.

“There are at least thirty of them, and furious as wild beasts. They swear you are here,” said the Abbot.

“Well, let’s meet them!” said Sir Thomas, in a cool tone.

“Meet them!”

“Yes, why not?”

“We cannot cope with them,” cried the Abbot. “Come on. We will hide you—we will hide you; but mind, my good friend, stir not, move not, till I come to you. I would not have you fall into the hands of those furious men for worlds. Come on—come on.”

By this time they arrived at the chapel, and the abbot bustled up into the pulpit, and pulling out a rich carpet, on which the monks’ sandalled feet reposed as they preached, he touched a spring. A part of the flooring flew up and shewed a bolt. The bolt was instantly withdrawn, the whole flooring raised, and the Abbot, in hot haste, cried—

“Come along, dear Sir Thomas. There is neither turning nor winding that will deceive

you. There, take the food—take the food. So stir not till I come to you."

"And the wine," said the monk who held the bottles.

"Ah! don't go without the wine," said the other monk. "You will need it, if you are detained in your hiding place."

"Be sure," repeated the Abbot, "to keep snug till I come to you."

The good natured monk's blue eyes looked anxious and kind, as he forced the knight up the stairs of the huge carved pulpit, and after thrusting the wine into his hands, hanged down the flooring, bolted it, and replaced the carpet.

"Brethren," said the Abbot, as he left the chapel, "see that you betray not our good friend—the man who is our guest, and one who is likely to be persecuted. Remember

your profession is one of brotherly love, mildness, and charity."

The monks pledged themselves not to betray their guest.

"But," said one of the party, "his horse is in the stable, and will most assuredly betray its master."

"That's well thought of," said the Abbot, "one of you go and turn the animal out into the orchard with the rest of the nags, and some one take the saddle, the arms, and armour and throw them into the fish-pond."

The monks were not slow in carrying out the instructions of the Abbott, and Sir Thomas's horse was soon neighing in the orchard, whilst his bright armour was scaring the dainty fish in the large pond, and sinking into the rich, soft mud at the bottom.

Meanwhile, the Abbot, calling together

every monk in the monastery, told them how matters stood, charged them to keep his friend's counsel, and to "back him up" in every word he should utter.

"For, my friends and brethren," he said, "Sir Thomas Fitzgerald is a good and sturdy churchman, and much to be preferred to a pack of haughty, licentious courtiers!"

The Abbot paused a moment, then called out to the porter to throw the gates wide open, and admit the impatient train of travellers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE porter, who was deformed, and with one leg shorter than the other, hobbled off to unbar and unchain the doors, whilst the portly, Abbot ranged his monks behind him in the court, and stood before the dense, brown mass with the air of a general, his bald head erect, his grey beard setting tight round his smiling mouth, whilst in his mild and laughing eye a look of grandeur was being called up, against the mirth that therein beamed.

All this time the mastiff had been barking,

the knocking and ringing never ceasing for a moment.

At length a trumpet sounded, and some one in as loud a voice as he could command, said—

“ In the name of our Sovereign Lord, the King, open the doors ! ”

But in spite of both trumpet and voice the doors were not opened.

The clamour outside re-commenced and continued until the lame porter threw the gates open, disclosing to the sight of those within the monastery, Lord Bruce, mounted on a white horse. He looked both very cross and very impatient. Accompanying him were four or five gay looking courtiers, a herald, and about thirty or more men-at-arms.

Those outside the monastery beheld, through the archway, the dark mass of monks and

their gallant Abbot, standing erect, at their head. They all kept their places as the others rode in.

“How dare you, you bald-pated rabble,” cried one of Lord Bruce’s courtier friends, looking extremely fierce, “how dare you keep us knocking and ringing at the gate whilst you were, I’ll be bound, hiding your cups and bowls!”

“Aye!” cried another of the courtiers, “and putting on your sanctity in a hurry.”

“And how dare you, you ambling sinners,” returned the Abbot, with all the dignity he could assume, “keep up such a disgraceful clamour at our holy gates?”

“Were we to leave our choir, and cut short the mass, that we might let you in a few minutes the sooner?” cried one of the monks.

“Abbot,” said Lord Bruce, “have done with all this wrangling.”

“Your friends have been the cause of it!” replied the Abbot.

“It matters not. I am here,” continued Lord Bruce, “in the King’s name, to seek for one Thomas Fitzgerald.”

“Then you should have come yesterday,” obserevd the Abbot.

“Why so?”

“Because the knight departed yesterday for Scotland.”

“For Scotland!” repeated Lord Bruce.

“Yes.”

“That’s a lie!” exclaimed one of Lord Bruce’s court friends.

“And a lie that will not serve your turn,” echoed Lord Bruce.

The Abbot bestowed a look of scorn on the lord and his friend, but condescended not to make a reply.

“Thomas Fitzgerald was seen on the evening of yesterday, with a hawk on his wrist, coming over the downs,” said Lord Bruce.

“Sir Philip Vaughan may have been so seen, Lord Bruce,” replied the Abbot, “but not Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.”

“And where is Sir Philip Vaughan?” demanded Lord Bruce.

“On the road to Carlisle, long ago. He left us at dawn.”

“Your monastery is more like a hostel than an abode for holy men,” exclaimed the courtier who had given the Abbot the lie. “Step out there, you young friar with the downy moustache.”

The young friar obeyed, and stood before

the courtier, swinging round the end of the cord that girt him, and eyeing the noble coolly but very keenly.

“Now tell me, young friar, how was Sir Philip Vaughan dressed yesterday evening?” asked the noble.

The monk ran over in one second Sir Thomas Fitzgerald’s costume, and answered his interrogator—

“In a chamois leather suit, such as is worn under armour, a red velvet cap, without a feather, and a long sword, in a steel scabbard.”

“That’s the dress the country boor told us the other wore, my lord,” said one of the men-at-arms.

“Nevertheless we will search the monastery in every nook and corner,” said Lord Bruce, addressing the Abbot.

The Abbot spoke not.

Whilst all this talking had been going on, one of the monks bethought him that Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's garments might betray him, so stealing off quietly, he cast them into a large and fiercely-burning fire in the kitchen, and stood by until he saw the last vestige of them destroyed, and so could tell no tale.

Lord Bruce and his followers dismounted, and, ere a couple of minutes, were scattered over the monastery, peering into the roof and into the cellar, and in the vaults of the chapel, and some of them jumped down into the yet unclosed tomb of Sir James Fitzgerald. But they tore and swore about the building all in vain.

Once again they all met in the court. The monks, too, were all there, headed as before

by their Abbot, who hoped that the new arrivals would, without further delay, take their departure. No such happiness.

“Our horses are weary,” said Lord Bruce, “and will be glad of food and rest.”

“And so shall we all,” said one of his courtier friends.

“With your permission, Abbot,” continued Lord Bruce, “we will remain here all night.”

The Abbot put the best face he could on the matter, and smiled on his intruders, saying to himself—

“Poor Sir Thomas! Poor Sir Thomas! What will he think?”

That knight, after being deposited and bolted into the floor of the pulpit, in utter darkness, his hands being full of provender, kicked his foot right and left, backwards

and forwards, to discover his way. His foot told him to go down many steps, straight on, as the Abbot had desired him; then he came to some stairs, which he ascended, and on arriving at the top of the said ladder-like stairs, he perceived a faint light.

Arrived at that light, he found himself in what he termed a stone box, which was high enough for him to stand upright; in length it was about four feet, and about as many in breadth, and, as far as he was able to discover, with no outlet with the exception of the stairs by which he had ascended.

The light into this stone box entered faint and dim through a very narrow slit in the stone work, to which Sir Thomas applied his eye. He could see little beyond the summit of a pillar on the other side of the aisle, and part of the two arches branching from it.

“ Well,” thought he, “ here I am, by St. George! like a cawing rook in a nest I can only get out by running my head through the pulpit stairs.

“ Lord Bruce here in the king’s name! Upon my life it is by no means pleasant. What is to be my fate now, I wonder. My good friend the Abbot was right; the haughty lord has been telling tales of me at court. Well, it can’t be helped, and what can’t be cured must be endured. It’s no use fuming, and fretting, and grieving for what is—no, and as for that, it’s as little use fuming and fretting, and grieving for what was, or what may be; so, as I have missed my dinner with the jolly monks below, I’ll eat it here, by St. George, and I’ll drink Lord Bruce’s health and a speedy departure.” And he forthwith filled himself a cup full of wine, and drank it off.

“Poor Lord Bruce!” he went on thinking; “he’s as anxious to avenge the death of his son, as I was to avenge the murder of my father. Ah! but there is a mighty difference between Lord Bruce’s revenge and mine. I killed Lord William in a fair and honourable fight, like a true knight. Lord William murdered my father in cold blood.”

Sir Thomas paused to take a second cup of wine, and then continued his line of argument.

“Yes; so it is; one quarrel begets another, and they get handed down from father to son—not that I shall have any one to revenge my death; for I’m alone in the world as far as kinsmen go.”

Sir Thomas gave a sigh at the thought of his loneliness, and sat himself down on the stone floor, with his feet on the stairs; he attacked

the food the monks had thrust into his hands, and made a very hearty repast, leaving nothing of the small brown loaf and monkish supply of fish. Then, taking another cup of wine, he thought the best thing he could do would be to lie down and try to sleep away the time. It was not many minutes ere he slept, and was dreaming that he and Lord Bruce were at court, in an iron cage, and that Lord Bruce was a ferocious lion, with a throat large enough to swallow him. This huge lion first bit off one of his ears, and then the other, much to the delight of the king and the courtiers, who were standing near. Then the lion opened his capacious jaws to the fullest extent, as if he intended swallowing his prey, when the victim thrust his plumed helmet into the throat of the roaring lion, to the great delight of the lookers on, causing the

lion to utter a series of groans and cries, whereupon Sir Thomas awoke and heard something very much like the visionary sounds of his dream, which, without wishing to do disparagement to the monks' music, it must, in truth, be told, arose from the choir below, where evening service was going on; Lord Bruce, his courtiers, and men-at-arms being present, some of whom, we are bound to say, were properly devout, some profoundly slept, whilst others lounged and lolled listlessly about.

Sir Thomas heard the sounds and smelt the incense; not the slightest thing could he see but the pillar opposite; for twilight, autumn twilight was coming on. Presently the service was at an end, and he heard the footsteps of a large number of persons departing. He could tell from the jingling of

spurs and tramp of iron that those who were in search of him were among the number.

Not long after came thick darkness, and Sir Thomas felt hunger, and patient though he was, he became cramped and weary of his stone lodging. He composed himself to rest, and slept by fits and starts. The night was a long and wearisome one to him, and morning found him both exceedingly hungry and cold.

“I have a great mind to dash myself through that pulpit floor,” he said to himself, “and fight my way out ; but that would be an ungrateful return for all the kindness I have received from my good friends the Abbot and the monks.” So he contented himself with uttering, under his voice, one or two pious curses on—not the ecclesiastics—Lord Bruce, his courtiers and men-at-arms, wishing he had to meet them in fair and open

fight. He then descended the stairs till he became well nigh suffocated, and was glad to climb up once more and take a mouthful of air through the slit in the stones.

Presently he heard the tramp of feet and the jingling of spurs, and then mass was proceeded with, and in due time silence again reigned below, and the knight, for something better to do, again composed himself to rest, and was soon in a profound, and, this time, quiet sleep, from which he was aroused by some one touching his knee, when, opening his eyes, he beheld his friend the Abbot, with his smiling face, emerging from the stairs.

“ By St. George ! ” cried Sir Thomas, jumping to his feet, and seizing the Abbot’s hand, “ I am truly overjoyed to see you, although I must confess the light is none of the best, nor the room one of the most capacious.”

The Abbot smiled.

“Are my enemies gone?” asked the knight.

“Yes,” replied the Abbot, gleefully. “I am happy to say they have been away these two hours.”

“Then I may leave this d— delightful retreat,” laughed the knight, having nearly committed himself by an oath.

“Yes.”

“And have a few more days of peace and quietness in the monastery?”

“If you will take my advice, you will not only follow the example of your enemies and leave the monastery, but get out of England as fast as you can.”

“Leave England!”

“Yes, without a moment’s delay,” replied the worthy Abbot.

“Without having something to eat?” asked Sir Thomas.

“Not quite so hastily as that,” replied the smiling Abbot. “But, my good friend, depend on it, the less time you remain in England the better.”

“Well, I want fresh air and food,” said the knight.

“Come along, you shall have both,” replied the Abbot.

“But you have not told me why you deem it desirable that I should leave England in such hot haste,” observed Fitzgerald.

“After you have replenished the inner man,” said the Abbot, with one of his pleasant smiles, “I will give you my reasons for thinking it expedient that you leave England without the least possible delay.”

Sir Thomas was very glad to get away from his stone box, and once more enter the pulpit, and as he and his worthy friend crossed the garden to the monastery, he imbibed with great zest the fresh, brisk air.

“Now tell me, my friend,” said Fitzgerald as they entered the Abbot’s apartment, “why I am to leave England?”

“Because—because—” replied the Abbot, with some hesitation, not liking to reveal to the knight the unpleasant fact.

“Because what?”

“Because you are outlawed!”

“Outlawed!” repeated Fitzgerald.

“And a prize offered to whoever may slay you, my poor friend,” said the Abbot, in a very melancholy tone.

“Ah!” cried Sir Thomas, “there is an-

other bit of that confounded dream, or prophecy of my poor father's fulfilled."

"Yes. Your worthy father related that dream to me."

"And it has been wonderfully fulfilled up to the present moment," replied the knight, with a somewhat heavy sigh.

"If I remember aright," said the Abbot, "it told of your being marred in youth."

"Yes," replied the knight. "And made in manhood."

"Yes."

"And that England should lose you, and a foreign land gain you. Was it not so?" asked the Abbot.

"Yes; and as I am going to leave England I take it a foreign land will gain me," remarked Sir Thomas.

“True,” replied the Abbot, “and then there will be another and important part of the dream to be fulfilled.”

“What’s that?”

“For love to make you,” replied the Abbot, with a smile.

“By St. George! my good friend, I had almost forgotten that. I hope it may,” said Sir Thomas, gleefully.

“I have a scheme for your escape, observed the Abbot, as soon as they had seated themselves.

“What scheme?”

“I will tell you,” answered the Abbot, rising from his chair and opening a closet, in which were a number of drawers, one of which he pulled out and took from it a razor, which he opened.

“ Is your scheme to cut my throat, and end all my adventures, good and bad ? ” cried the knight, laughing.

“ No, no ; not so, not so. Come, sit down,” for the knight had risen from his chair, “ and I will shave your head.”

“ Shave my head ! ” repeated Fitzgerald, with some amazement.

“ Yes ; and with this garment of our order we will — ”

“ Do what ? ” asked the knight.

“ Make a friar of you.”

“ Make a friar of me ! ” laughed the knight, more and more amazed.

“ And then,” continued the Abbot, “ you will have no difficulty in escaping to a foreign land in safety.”

“ I thank you with my whole heart,” said Fitzgerald, somewhat sadly, “ but I care very

little whether I live or die. One can die but once. What consequence whether it be now or a few years later?"

"Nonsense, nonsense, Sir Thomas; sit down," pleaded the Abbot, tucking up his sleeves, and getting his shaving apparatus in order.

"Well, I suppose you must have your own way," responded the knight, as he resumed his seat and prepared for the operation.

"Better, far better that I should have my own way, than that the hangman should cut off your knightly head."

"Perhaps so."

"Perhaps so," repeated the Abbot. "I am sure so. *He* would cut off your head for present revenge, and *I* shall shave it for future glory."

In less than five minutes Sir Thomas's head

was robbed of its beautiful light hair that had grown so luxuriantly, and now there remained only a narrow circle round his crown.

This shaving operation concluded, more to the satisfaction of the Abbot than the knight, the latter was arrayed in a friar's dress, sandals were put on his feet, and gold in his breast, for the Abbot insisted on his taking back all the coins he had given him, as a compensation for the loss of arms and clothes.

“And now give me something to eat,” said the knight, when he was fully equipped, “and then I will depart, and bless you for all you have done for me.”

“And I will bless thee!” cried the Abbot, much affected at the approaching separation; “and pray for your success in the future.”

“Perhaps, at no distant time, I may return here,” said the knight, “to end my days

peaceably among you; and if I do, then lay my bones beside my father's."

An hour after, Sir Thomas had left the monastery, and was striding away over the downs. He covered his head with his hood, and it served to hide his face. So handsome a monk was seldom seen, or one who went on his way with such elastic tread. He stopped for a time to look from a distance at the old Tower, but that was anything but safe employment, as he soon perceived, for some of Lord Bruce's people were there; wherefore, with one last steadfast glance, one deep drawn sigh, he turned away, never more to look upon his paternal and legitimate dwelling.

The knight took the same route which he and his friend Stephen Stanley had pursued years before, fugitives together, and he thought of those times; and the different land-

marks he passed awakened many long dormant ideas. He recollects fragments of the merry conversations between himself and his ever firm friend, and these recollections made him feel sad; but he soon roused himself.

“Well, I am about to leave England,” he thought; “after all, it is but a very small slice of a very large world; and that world is before me. Being thus driven from my native land, is distasteful, but the trouble has come upon me through no disgraceful conduct on my part, but by treachery. I slew Lord William Bruce fairly, as knight should knight, and now I suffer for it.”

He paused for a short time, and his thoughts reverted to his sojourn with De Briffault; but in a few minutes he again soliloquized on his present position.

“My fame is not tarnished, nor my name

disgraced by a set of yelping curs of courtiers. Still, I should have liked to have lived and died in old England ; but as that cannot be I must make both name and fame elsewhere. It is the part of a fool to grieve over what cannot be helped. It is the part of an honest man to set about his work in life cheerfully, and boldly, and I will do both—yes, by St. George ! I will !”

Sir Thomas, after these reflections, went his way cheerfully. He wanted neither food, nor raiment, nor lodging, for every one was ready to feed and house the good friar, and his friend the Abbot had amply clothed him. He arrived safely in London, and, that same night, was fortunate enough to meet with a small vessel, which was bound for France ; and, without a minute's delay, he went on board.

He watched the coast of England for some time after the river was passed, and would have continued watching till not a point of land or rock was to be seen; but the weather was stormy, and the sea was rough, with a very heavy swell, causing not only the vessel to roll and heave, but the knight's head to turn dizzy, and each time the vessel sunk between the waves, his heart felt like an inflated skin in his breast. He turned deadly pale and closed his eyes—which did him no good, perhaps made matters worse, and ere many minutes, the valiant knight succumbed to that great marine foe—sea-sickness, and felt so prostrate, he thought, as though death would be more preferable.

“Curse this pitching and tossing!” he cried, in his agony.

“Eh ! It is enough to make a monk swear,” said the captain of the vessel, who had overheard the words.

Poor Fitzgerald groaned, but refrained from further ejaculations.

However, misfortune as well as pleasure, has an end ; and after a few hours, the banished knight, in the disguise of a monk, was landed on the French coast, looking like a dead man, his dark hood shading his fearfully white visage.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, at this period, was thirty years old, and for more than ten years had been travelling in all lands and in all countries. The ladies had angled for him, but he was still heart whole. Although he had resided so long in France he had never been able to master French, a matter of sur-

prise, for he spoke both Italian and German remarkably well. His fame extended over all the countries he visited, as the champion of the oppressed, whose wrongs he redressed, and as being the bravest of the brave. He had grown a giant in strength, well made, iron knit, erect, handsome and noble. He courted the company of English knights in preference to the knights of any other country, and they carried tidings of his prowess to his native land.

For nearly three years he disappeared from "public life." He went on pilgrimages, hung up his sword for awhile, and during this time his day-dreams were of the English Monastery near his Tower, and he often wished to carry his well-earned laurels there, and end his adventurous life beneath a gown and cowl.

What he did remains to be unfolded incident by incident and step by step, which will then bring us to the end of this tale of stirring adventure.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR THOMAS FITZGERALD landed at Leghorn one bright, dazzling, sunshiny day, and went direct to a place of entertainment, where he at once doffed his friar's garments. His dress beneath was soiled and old, and his beard and hair were of most unseemly length.

He called to the host, saying—

“ Have you a barber near at hand, who can shave off my grisly beard and trim my overgrown hair ?”

“Yes, there is one living not a hundred paces off, and he can bleed you as well as shave your beard,” replied the man, in a jocular voice.

“Bleed me!” cried the knight, “I have no blood to spare. Can he make a coat?”

“Make a coat!” repeated the host in some surprise.

“Yes, and a complete suit.”

“No, but there is a tailor not ten yards further off, who can.”

“Send for both,” said Sir Thomas, and in a few minutes the barber had commenced his operations, and the knight’s hair and beard were properly trimmed. The tailor, too, in the course of a couple of days had equipped him in a goodly suit of plain clothes, and Sir Thomas, having paid for his improvements, stood forth again a goodly looking man.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald was now nearly fifty years of age. What an age for a hero of romance ! He had been a temperate man, and consequently his health was not impaired. His vigour was great as ever, and the wrinkles on his fine, high forehead were the faintest of the faint. His cheek was bronzed, but his eye had lost neither its colour nor its brightness. His chest was broad and full ; his hair and beard, it must be confessed, were somewhat grey. His arm was strong, his tread as firm as ever.

His teeth beneath his firm set lips were still white, and his countenance, though grave, was noble. He was, in fact, likely to attract attention wherever he bent his steps.

Sir Thomas heard mass, and hung up his pilgrim's staff in the chapel as an offering. He bought a horse, girt on a sword, and left Leghorn, turning his course towards Milan.

“A horse is no bad thing,” he thought, “after all my wanderings on foot. By St. George! I should like well enough to try my arm in a good fight. My good friends in the different monasteries have well-nigh spoilt me. The easy life I led amongst them was inconsistent with the duties of a true knight. Never mind, I’ll make up for my shortcomings and my slothfulness one of these days.”

So Sir Thomas put his steed to its metal and galloped along, thinking no more of monks or monasteries, for his old fighting life’s charms arose vividly to his mind’s eye.

On arriving at Milan he intended to provide himself with a first-rate suit of steel, and with this idea he thought of nothing beyond fighting and glory. He sat as erect as ever in his saddle. His clothes were black velvet, and his head was covered with a cap of the

same material, ornamented by a white feather and gold clasp, in form resembling a scallop shell.

Some years before, Sir Thomas had, on foot, visited Jerusalem, and many other shrines in many lands. His “soul was made,” as the peasantry in Ireland say. Purgatory had no terrors for him ; his heart and conscience were easy, and he rode on in a very happy mood beneath the purple sky.

Still, there was now and then a shade of melancholy on his countenance, a vein of sadness in his happiness, and it showed itself in the quiet expression of his visage. He felt that he was alone in the world, though everyone was his friend ; but these friends had no blood in common with him, and he had led too roving a life to cultivate their society as friends require to be cultivated. He could not

help being aware that there were scores of hearts beating gratefully for him ; but he had no relations, no wife to love him entirely, no child to lavish his affections upon, no brothers or sisters.

Now, this made his life somewhat sad, and that, too, without his really knowing it, for Sir Thomas Fitzgerald did not think about kin, and he was happy when those he was among smiled upon him, and smiles were always lavished upon him in great abundance.

Sometimes, when the knight had nothing particular to occupy his attention, he would wish to give up a roaming life, and set himself down to live in peace and quietness in some retired spot with those he liked ; and when in these moods he would picture to himself the monastery in his native downs ; and

Isabelle de Liancourt's image would cross his mind, causing him to heave a deep sigh. Then, too, a thought of marriage would arise, and induce a smile to pass over his countenance, as he remembered the pert young knights he constantly saw courting the fair and beautiful damsels.

“By St. George!” he said, laughing and handling his grey curly beard. “I shouldn't stand a chance in winning a young wife, and—and—I won't marry an old one.”

So Sir Thomas rode on. The sun darted down his fiery force, and the parched ground sent back the rays bestowed upon it with ten-fold ardour. The goats ran rapidly about on the heated rocks, stopped suddenly, turned their heads, panted for a minute, and then continued their pace. Some fell to the earth on their backs, and, anon, wriggled to their feet and ran off again.

The knight stopped in the meridian of the scorching day, and as he reclined on a bed in a large darkened room in a monastery which had received him, the pulses in his temples throbbed fearfully, and his head felt heavy and giddy.

A monk entered the room.

“What is it, my friend?” asked Sir Thomas, in a languid voice.

“I have come to ask you to partake of our dinner.”

“I will do so, with many thanks.”

He arose, and following the monk to the large refectory, at once took his seat among the silent friars, and ate plentifully in spite of the odd feeling over him—such as he had never before experienced.

The knight felt but little inclination to resume his journey that day, but his horse being led out at the time he had requested, he

mounted and trotted off. He found, however, that trotting was irksome to him, so the horse was suffered to walk. The path he pursued, for road it could not be called, was exceedingly narrow and winding, among rocks. The heat, too, was very oppressive, inducing Sir Thomas to pull open his jerkin, and loosen his shirt collar, as well as to envy the goats that so merrily gambolled about, bounding from crag to crag. His mouth was parched and burning, and though he drank at every spring he came to, his thirst increased.

“What the devil’s the matter with me?” he said to himself. “I have never felt the like during my whole life. By St. George! I do believe I’m not well,” and he pressed his hand against his forehead and allowed his horse to go its own pace.

As evening drew on, he came to a nest of

dwellings and looked about to find some one in which he could rest.

After a few minutes he found what he sought, and at once entered the large yard, and calling out for the ostler, that functionary almost instantly made his appearance, and ran and held the stirrup, whilst the knight wearily dismounted.

The host came and led the way to the very top of the house, followed by Fitzgerald, with heavy, aching limbs. The room, into which he was conducted, had been heated in every part by the fiercely burning sun of mid-day; and as the room was extremely small and very low, the atmosphere was like unto that of an oven.

“ This has been a hot day, sir,” said the landlord.

“ Yes,” returned Fitzgerald; “ and the sun

has caused this room of yours to be as hot as the infernal regions."

"I am no judge of that," said the landlord, with a facetious smile.

"But you may be," said Sir Thomas, somewhat irritated at the host's smile.

"I hope not."

"Well, let me have some supper as quickly as you can."

"Certainly. What will you have to drink?" asked the host.

"Oh! some light wine."

"Supper shall be served as speedily as possible," and with a bow the man left the room.

The supper came, but Sir Thomas was unable to swallow more than two or three mouthsful, and wondered why this was, for he was hungry. However, after another in-

effectual effort at forcing down some garlic, he pushed away his platter in disgust. He poured out some wine which he drank off at a draught, and finding that it allayed his thirst he swallowed glass after glass till all was finished, and then throwing himself on the bed, tried to compose himself to sleep. This, however, the heat prevented, and tired as he was, and with a splitting head-ache, he was compelled to rise and undress himself, and again getting into bed he a second time endeavoured to sleep. Oh! vain attempt—fleas, mosquitoes, thirst, fever, all forbad it. He heard all the sounds in the country die off one by one. The last he was distinctly conscious of, was the soft notes of a flute in the distance.

Hour after hour he lay tossing and turning about on his wearisome bed—at one moment in a burning fever, the next, in a cold

shivering fit. His thoughts in disorder, the night seemed an eternity.

After a time he went over and over again in his mind a portion of a song his friend Stephen Stanley used to sing to him. He could remember only four lines; but these he sang to himself many times.

As day dawned he slept an unfreshing sleep for about an hour and a half, then rising and dressing himself, he wandered around the place to breathe the pure fresh air of the morning; but he felt weary, exhausted, and feverish, and, throwing himself beneath some trees, passed an hour or two in dreamy silence, little heeding how the time sped.

As he returned to his resting place, which stood between two low stone walls on the hill-side, without so much as a tree to shelter it from the now scorching sun and heat,

he reflected that on board the ship he had sailed in from Constantinople to Leghorn, was a small, meagre Jew, burning with fever. Now this unfortunate Israelite had been kicked and cuffed about by the crew, who, when his fever burst forth, came to the determination of throwing him overboard, and being about to execute their unchristian purpose, the poor sick Hebrew had run to the sturdy, sedate, benevolent-looking pilgrim—who was Sir Thomas—and clasping his arms about him, had clung tightly to him—causing him to inhale his fevered breath—and with all the agonies of a condemned man, had entreated him to protect his life. The crew swore and stormed, and the poor frightened man clung all the closer to the pilgrim, who, as a good Catholic, shuddered at the touch of a Jew; but the sight of

a diminutive, weak, persecuted fellow-creature, shivering with fear and sickness, entreating him with shrieks and tears to save him from three savage-looking, half-naked, tall, muscular men, ready to pounce upon him, overcame all prejudices, and the man and the Christian spoke within him.

“Stand off!” cried Sir Thomas, to the poor Jew’s assailants, and succouring him with his strong left arm, he brandished his staff with the other. “Stand off! What harm has the poor Jew done that he should be thus treated?”

“You are a fine pilgrim,” said one, “to take part with and cherish an accursed Jew.”

“Oh!” cried a second man, “what’s the use of spending your breath in arguing the point?”

“Aye, aye,” said the third man, “the best

argument will be to throw the pair of them overboard. Come, let's over with them without further parley."

"Stand off! I say," cried Sir Thomas.

But neither his words nor the entreaties of the poor Israelite were of the slightest avail, and Sir Thomas being above arguing with the rough brutes, felled the first, who attempted to seize him, with his staff, then putting the Jew behind him, it was only the work of a few minutes to knock down a second with the same weapon, and to bruise and disfigure the third with his fists, which had never failed him in any emergency.

The first man having recovered from the blow he had received, sprang to his feet, calling out to his comrades to come with him and get their knives; but Sir Thomas, hearing this, followed the man and knocked him over

the vessel's side. This brought the other two to their senses as they saw their stunned shipmate go down into the sea, never to rise again.

There was silence for a short time, and then the sick Jew, crawling along on his knees, embraced the knight's legs and kissed his hands and feet, weeping and shivering all the while.

“Curses on all Jews and heretics,” muttered the man who had felt the weight of Sir Thomas's staff.

“Aye, and curses on all bad Catholics, say I,” returned the other ruffian, who had now recovered from the punishment of the knight's fists.

“I'll tell you what, my fine fellows,” said Sir Thomas; “if you have no desire to be sent after your ruffianly companion, I should advise

you to keep your mutterings about Jews and heretics to yourselves."

And the knight shook his staff at them, but made no further remark.

"How long will it be ere we reach Leghorn?" asked Sir Thomas.

"About three hours."

"That's well."

And in about four hours from that time Sir Thomas saw the Jew safely to his home in the Israelitish quarter of Leghorn.

* * * *

Now as the knight took his way at a slow feeble pace along the pathway, the thought came across his mind that perchance he might have caught the Jew's fever, which was an idea that was by no means pleasant to contemplate.

The knight, however, determined not to give in, so having paid for his lodging and refreshment, he mounted his horse once more, and rode off under the still fiercely burning sun. Not a breath of air was stirring, and the grasshoppers chirped loudly. There was no verdure, for the parched, dried up grass was like living hay, and the road he had to traverse was completely devoid of anything like trees.

Sir Thomas put his horse to his paces, to try if he could gallop off his pains, but the vehement throbbing of his head soon made him glad to draw bridle, and take a slower pace.

As day wore on he found it impossible to ride, as he was wont to ride, in a firm and erect position. In spite of all his efforts, his head inclined towards his chest, and his back

bowed. He took his feet from the stirrups, he removed the cap from his head, and rode on very slowly.

In the extreme distance, the towers and walls of a town were visible. This town Sir Thomas determined to reach, although every limb ached. He suffered alternately parching heat and cold, or rather, if there can be such things, hot shivers ran over him. He had the greatest difficulty in keeping open his drooping, heavy eyelids. His breath came in short, spasmodic gaspings, and his hands were like hot stones.

On and on he rode, though scarcely able to sit his horse; but the scorching sun no longer darted its rays upon him, for day had departed and the moon rode high in the heaven. There was not a breath of air to refresh the weary and almost worn out knight.

Sir Thomas could see the lights in the city which, as near as he could guess, was not more than a mile distant. The true Briton, in spite of both his courage and endurance, was obliged to pull up his horse, and, with difficulty dismounting, fastened the animal to a tree, which he had no sooner accomplished than his head became dizzy, his limbs trembled, and for lack of power he reeled, fell to the ground at the foot of the tree, and there awaited his fate, whatever it might chance to be.

How the hours sped the knight little knew; from time to time he opened his eyes and fixed them vacantly on the sky, and the leaves of the tree above him. He told himself he would soon rise and ride forward, in order to reach the town, and fight in a tournament the

next day; then he suddenly spoke to the Jew, and from that time his mind became blank.

The poor sick knight rolled restlessly on the hard ground, and the next moment lay as if he were in a fainting fit, the moonbeams streaming brightly on his deadly white face, as he lay there like a corpse, but for the groans he, unknown to himself, uttered in his suffering.

How long he remained in this pitiable state he was quite unconscious, but when he opened his eyes he beheld a number of persons standing around him. Some were on horseback, and there was a litter, which, in his enfeebled state of mind, he took for a coffin.

Arms were about him, and he saw a swarthy face looking round at him from behind the owner of the arms. An old man stood before

him, with a gold chain and medal flashing coldly on his breast in the moonlight.

“He has opened his eyes, my lord,” said the young man who supported the knight in his arms; and “He has opened his eyes” went from mouth to mouth.

The knight closed his eyes again, and his head sank on the shoulder of his supporter. But he felt as if unable to speak.

“Who are you?” enquired the young man.

“An English knight,” feebly replied Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.

“Who does he say he is?” enquired the elder man.

“An English knight.”

“He will never be able to ride,” said the old Count to the young man; “what will be the best way of removing him?”

Fitzgerald heard what was said, and cared not what was done, but sank back again in the young man's arms. The next minute he heard a very soft and pleasant voice at a short distance saying—

“Place the poor sick Englishman in my litter; I can ride on my uncle's horse.”

“Yes, my love, I will take you before me,” replied the Count.

“Help me out, Barthé.”

The voice sounded close to the knight.

“He is dying, Barthé. I am certain he is dying,” said the soft voice.

“I trust not,” said the Count.

“Oh! uncle, see how deadly pale he is. Look, Barthé, is he not dying?” cried the voice of the lady.

“He looks very ghastly,” said Barthé; “but I think he will recover.”

Sir Thomas felt his hand taken by two very small and very soft ones, whilst the gentle voice again said—

“ His hand is like a hot stone. Let him be put into the litter at once. He is a very handsome old man ! Pray to the Virgin that he may not die !”

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald opened his eyes, and kneeling beside him he saw a real Italian beauty ; and her jet black, lustrous eyes gleamed on him with the most tender pity, and she sighed as he looked languidly at her, shaking her head sadly.

The sick Englishman was then lifted from the ground.

“ Be gentle with him,” said the lady, and she continued to hold his hand in hers whilst he was being placed in the litter.

“I hope he will not die,” she uttered in a whisper to Barthé.

“I thank you with all my heart,” said Sir Thomas, with an effort.

Whilst the knight was being placed on the litter, he heard the young man say, in very tender, but low tones—

“Jacinta, you will ride with me, instead of with your uncle.”

“No, Barthé,” replied Jacinta Guicioli. “I shall go with my uncle.”

Sir Thomas’s aching limbs rested on downy cushions in the litter, and which ever way he looked, a pair of dazzling black eyes seemed gazing down upon him. His mind was wandering, and he fancied the most horrible reptiles were crawling about him. He struggled with a huge serpent which had fas-

tened on his throat to strangle him ; till turning over on his side, the night-mare no longer tormented him, and he slept peacefully.

He was awakened by lights flashing across his eyes, and by hearing many voices. He was being lifted from the litter.

“Be tender with him,” said the beautiful Italian girl, “and convey him to bed.”

“I will go with him,” said the young man called Barthé.

“Thank you, Barthé, and will you see he has everything that his pitiable condition requires ;” and she sighed a gentle sigh.

“I will take care that all his wants are supplied.”

Sir Thomas was undressed and placed in a large, cool bed. A leech had been summoned, and he held a silver cup, containing a cool drink, to the knight’s lips. He then bared

the arm and bled him profusely, causing the sick man's head to grow doubly confused, till at length he became unconscious of all they did and all that was passing around him.

Poor Sir Thomas heard not his own ravings, nor was he aware of the force that was used to keep him in the bed. He did not know that he was in the palace of Count de Guicioli. He fancied himself in battles, and shouted and fought, imagining young Barthé, who watched beside him, an enemy, making the kind youth's watching a service of difficulty and danger. He continued in a state of delirium for many days and nights, raving and fighting till he was almost worn to a skeleton.

At length the fever left him, and Sir Thomas awoke with his senses about him ; but where was the strength his delirium had given him ? He was as weak as a child. He

looked around him and saw a large handsome room but dimly lighted, and two figures sleeping beside the bed.

Sir Thomas tried to raise himself, but all his efforts were ineffectual. He endeavoured to collect his scattered thoughts, and after a few minutes remembered riding in pain beneath a hot sun; but beyond this he could recollect nothing. He made a second attempt to raise himself, but again he failed.

“ Hallo ! there,” he cried in English, in a very tremulous and feeble voice, “ give me some water, by St. George ! ”

One of the sleepers started up and asked in Italian what he wanted; the other left the room, and in a few minutes returned bringing Barthé with him, partly dressed.

Then a light flashed across his brain. He began to have a dim recollection of having

seen Barthé before ; then he thought of moonlight and a pair of beautiful, black eyes.

He heard Barthé tell one of the men to go for the leech, and he tried to speak, but the effort seemed too great, and he merely heaved a deep sigh.

In a few minutes the Count Guicioli came into the room.

Sir Thomas, taxing all his strength, asked him where he was.

“In my palace, knight,” replied Count Guicioli, with great urbanity.

“In your palace !” repeated the knight, rubbing his eyes.

“Yes, in my palace,” repeated the Count, “and where you are most welcome.”

“Thank you ; but may I ask the name of my kind host.

“Count Guicioli.”

Sir Thomas closed his eyes for a minute to collect his ideas, and then said—

“ I suppose I am dying.”

“ I trust not,” replied the Count.

“ I am ready to depart,” went on the knight, without heeding the comforting words of the Count. He thought of the pilgrim’s life he had led, and a ray of joy passed through his mind.

Again the sick man closed his eyes.

“ I have no enemy to forgive. I die happy,” added the knight, turning his head towards the Count and opening his dim eyes.

“ No, good knight,” said the Count, “ you will not die.”

“ I feel that I am dying,” continued Sir Thomas, “ and I shall leave the world in peace with all men.”

“ You will not die, I feel almost certain,” said the Count.

The sick Englishman shook his head.

“ Shall I send for the leech ?”

“ No, send for a priest,” replied Sir Thomas, in feeble tones. “ I thank you for all your kindness. I am dying.”

“ No, no, my friend,” said Barthé, briskly, “ you will not die. Don’t talk of priests. It is the leech you most need.”

Fitzgerald turned his eyes towards Barthé, but spoke not.

And scarcely were Barthé’s words uttered than that personage arrived, looking exceedingly sleepy. He approached his patient, gazed gravely at him, and informed him that the aspect of the stars was favourable to his perfect recovery. He then felt Sir Thomas’s pulse.

“ Am I dying ?” asked the knight.

“ What makes you think you are ?” inquired the leech.

“ My utter want of strength.”

“ Is that all ?”

“ No, my thirst is insupportable.”

“ Then drink as much as you like.”

“ I cannot rouse myself,” continued the sick man, with something like a sigh.

“ Then go to sleep, and the longer you sleep the better,” and having said this he bowed gravely, stroked his chin, and went home to bed again.

Sir Thomas, taking advantage of the permission, drank a good draught, and sinking back on his pillow, fell into a deep sleep, which lasted many hours.

CHAPTER X.

SIR THOMAS FITZGERALD, from the time he awoke from his long sleep, began to regain his health. What is more wearying than the recovery from an illness? Weak knees, trembling hands, heavy legs, light head—something after the fashion of an inflated paper bag. Then follows the ravenous appetite, which apparently can never be satisfied.

There are pleasant moments, too, in such a state, when tired and exhausted we go to a cool, soft bed, and there sink into a deep,

quiet sleep; then again when we first feel the fresh air, and when we can eat without disgust.

All this Sir Thomas Fitzgerald went through. He arose with difficulty from his bed, and, supported by Barthé, reached the large window at the end of the huge bedroom. In a few days he was strong enough to walk there alone. Then he went forth into the stone balcony which, at a considerable height, overhung the garden beneath. There he breathed the soft evening air, and there he recounted to Barthé and the Count Guicioli his many adventures. He observed that Barthé was constantly peeping over the balustrades and following, with ardent looks and a half smile, some object in the garden, and turning his eyes in the same direction, Sir Thomas beheld, evening after evening,

Jacinta Guicioli strolling amidst the flowers from terrace to terrace, or resting beside the cool fountain. Sometimes her voice, rich and full, burst forth in melody, the soft wind wafting her songs up to the height where they sat and talked.

The Englishman remembered the black eyes, and watched every movement of the beautiful Jacinta Guicioli. Barthé's tender looks told him they were lovers.

By degrees the knight's strength returned, and Barthé began to talk to him of Jacinta—in fact he talked about nothing else, and Sir Thomas liked the subject, but did not admire the way in which Barthé handled it. His manner was too ardent, though the Englishman made all allowances for foreign vehemence.

The day came, or rather the evening, when

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald and his two friends for the first time descended to walk in the garden. The evening was as bright and beautiful as could be desired, the peacocks were screeching at the very top of their voices, the trees were waving to and fro in the light breeze, the sparkling fountain was playing merrily, and the deep purple of the sky looked very unfathomable, and standing at the end of one of the terraces was Jacinta Guicioli, leaning on the massive marble balustrade. Her beautiful head was in sharp relief against the clear sky, and her bright eyes were watching the sports of her greyhound beneath.

Barth , the moment he saw her, dashed off, and in an instant stood ardent and voluble by her side.

“ May I be allowed to pay my respects to your niece, Count?” asked Sir Thomas, with

an air of diffidence. “I know I owe her gratitude for much kindness.”

“Certainly, Sir Thomas,” replied the Count, “she has many times enquired after you during your illness, and she will, I am sure, be rejoiced to congratulate you on your restoration to better health.”

“Jacinta,” continued the Count, as his niece and Barthé drew near, “let me introduce you to Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, the brave English knight we have so often talked of. She knows all your exploits, my friend, and admires them even more, if possible, than I do.”

Jacinta held out her hand, and Sir Thomas raised it to his lips, and kissed it respectfully.

“I am glad to be able to congratulate you, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald,” said the Italian

lady, "on your greatly improved health. I much feared, from the sad reports I listened to from day to day, that you would die."

"I thank you with all my heart, dear lady," returned Sir Thomas, taking off his cap. "And I thank you also for your great kindness to me the night I was found beneath the tree."

"Name it not, Sir Thomas. I was only too glad to be able to render you the slight assistance."

"Not slight, dear lady. You saved my life," said Sir Thomas.

More discourse followed, but Count Guicioli usurped all the knight's conversation. Barthé and Jacinta left them to saunter about the garden.

Jacinta's voice charmed Sir Thomas despite himself, and engaged his attention. She

laughed with Barthé, and his face showed that his talk was earnest and fiery. To the knight Count Guicioli appeared extremely irksome.

The evening was fast advancing, when Jacinta came suddenly up to her uncle and Sir Thomas.

“Sir,” she said, somewhat timidly, addressing Fitzgerald, “it gets cold, and I fear the night air will be dangerous after your recent illness.”

“I thank you for your kind thought of me,” replied Fitzgerald, bowing.

“Ah! it was very inconsiderate of me to keep you here,” cried the Count. “It is well for us men that we have the ladies to look after us. Come, sir,” and they turned towards the palace.

Again Guicioli talked, and again his talk

was about his domains and castle, and the knight nodded assent, or shook his head as the case required; but Jacinta's musical tones occupied his thoughts.

“Barthé,” he heard her say, as they ascended the steps leading to a door, strong enough to resist a fierce attack; “Barthé, I thought the Englishman had been quite an old man the night I first saw him. He looked so deadly pale in the moonlight; but he is not.”

“No,” returned Barthé; “I should say he is not much above forty.”

“His air is commanding, he is erect and very handsome,” said Jacinta with a slight flush in her face.

“Yes, all you say is true;—but do answer me, dear Jacinta!”

“And he's a strong man,” continued

Jacinta, as if she did not hear the entreaty of her lover.

“Yes, he’s a strong man,” repeated Barthé; “but do give me an answer to what I asked you just now?”

“I will never answer that, Barthé. But tell me; do you know if Sir Thomas has a wife and children?”

“I do not know.”

“And don’t care, I suppose,” said Jacinta, with a slight laugh.

“Jacinta! Jacinta! Why will you persist in tormenting me. Answer me—in Heaven’s name, answer me.”

“I will tell you nothing, Barthé,” and at this juncture Jacinta and her devoted slave entered the room in which their evenings were usually passed.

Sir Thomas remained with them. He

said little, but observed much. He saw enough to convince him that Barthé was over head and ears in love with Jacinta—that he loved her with all his soul. He appeared to be her accepted lover, and yet he could see that Barthé's conversation was irksome to the lady. Her eye did not answer his; she rather seemed to shun his looks.

“The love is all on Barthé’s side,” soliloquised the knight; “that’s quite evident.”

Count Guicioli was completely absorbed in reading a huge manuscript romance of chivalry, in which Julius Cæsar and King Arthur broke lances furiously together, and fiery dragons were vanquished by youthful knights, and royal ladies fell desperately in love with esquires, who became knights and carried them off; and giants drank blood out of large cups, the wine in which would have

been sufficient to float a navy, and mis-shapen dwarfs stumped about on crooked legs and squinted fiercely.

Thus it was that Count Guicioli, with his elbows on the table, and his chin in his hands, regaled himself all the evening ; and Sir Thomas, leaning back in his chair, wrapped his cloak around him, and partly closing his eyes, watched the Italian maiden and her adorer.

Jacinta listened and smiled at his devotion, but from time to time cast a stolen glance on the knight.

“I cannot tell how it is,” thought the maiden, “but there is a certain something in the Englishman’s countenance that both interests and attracts me.”

Jacinta’s thoughts were responded to by the knight also thinking,

“ By St. George ! my heart is warming and softening. I am half in love with her charming face and beautiful liquid black eyes. I must be off to bed, or—” And starting up with a sigh, and taking his cap from the table, he bade them all good night, leaving the Italian beauty in a fit of abstraction, and Barthé exceedingly irritable.

Count Guicioli, too, closed his manuscript.

“ I wish that good knight would never leave us,” said the Count.

This wish gladdened—she knew not why—Jacinta’s heart, and as she looked at Barthé she thought his complexion very sallow, and his eyes both fierce and diabolical.

On a certain night, about a fortnight after this, Jacinta went to her bed-room, and no

sooner had she entered it than she ordered her tire woman to place the silver lamp upon the table and leave the room.

Immediately the door was closed, Jacinta opened the window and looked out. The window, which was very high in the air, and guarded by iron bars, commanded a view into the garden of a convent opposite. She leant her head against the iron bars, and held them with one white hand, whilst the other hung listlessly by her side. Her small red lips were firmly closed, and her arched eyebrows contracted. Then she sighed, and, raising her head, fixed her flashing eyes on the calm crescent moon, and that shone on the sparkling gems and gold that adorned her person.

The moon could make the gems sparkle, it could not tell what was passing in the maiden's mind ; but we can, and here it is—

“No, no, Barthé, I never can be your wife. It is true we were affianced when we were babes, and that because our fathers had been firm friends. It is true also that we became orphans in the same year, and we have played together through our childhood. Barthé loves me with an ardent devotion, and he is rich and great. He is tolerably good-looking, too, and I like him better than all the other young knights I have ever seen, but I cannot and will not be his wife. Tomorrow he returns to his own home, and tomorrow I will bid my uncle tell him that I can never wed him, and I know he will tell him. I love Barthé as a brother, and nothing more; but if he perseveres in this love, even my friendship for him will vanish. I pity him, but he will soon find some other lady to adore, and then he will be happy.”

Feeling somewhat chilly, Jacinta closed the lattice and retired to bed, wondering if England were near Rome, and whether all Englishmen had blue eyes, a noble presence, and curly hair and beards. She slept soundly, and in the morning her first thought was similar to the last one at night.

As she made her toilet she pondered on the important matter to be transacted between herself and her uncle, Count Guicioli. Having completed her dressing, she passed from her room, and descending the stairs traversed a vast and lofty hall, into which opened the doors of many apartments, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's among the rest. As she was about leaving this dimly-lighted and cool ante-room, she encountered Sir Thomas himself, who was returning from the garden, carrying a splendid rose in his hand.

The knight bowed courteously, taking off his cap, and Jacinta said with one of her blandest smiles—

“What a lovely rose!”

The knight put it into her hand ; their eyes met, and they passed on without either uttering another word.

Jacinta pursued her way, put the ‘lovely rose’ to her lips, and after that placed it in her boddice. She descended another staircase, and entered another ante-room, beneath the former ; as she entered, Barthé rushed towards her, and seizing her hand drew her to a window, and fixing his sparkling eyes on her said—

“Dear Jacinta, this is the last day that I shall remain here. Jacinta—dear Jacinta—I need not tell you how devotedly I love you. My actions, my looks, all have told you so ;

you are my affianced bride, when will you be my wife?"

Jacinta did not answer, and Barthé went on in the same impassioned strain—

"I cannot leave you till you have spoken and told me that."

Barthé looked passionately at her, hope and expectation in his countenance, Jacinta's eyes were turned away, and still she answered not ; a shade passed over Barthé's visage, and his voice trembled as he said—

"Jacinta, why do you not answer. Is it coquetry that sways you, and makes you so fearfully torment me?"

Jacinta, not knowing what to say, wisely said nothing.

"Is it coquetry, Jacinta?" he went on.
"Then be coquettish with me for ever, rather than that the suspicion which has often crossed

my mind should be confirmed. Speak, dear Jacinta, when will you be my wife?"

Still Barthé was unanswered ; he looked sorrowful — he looked angry — he looked doubting, and at length exclaimed —

" Jacinta, if you do not love me, tell me so at once, say ' Barthé, I detest you,' say anything rather than be thus silent. I have often thought you did not love me. Speak to me the dreaded truth. Must I live without you. Let me know my fate at once!"

Barthé's eyes were full of tears ; his face was flushed ; he bent his head forward and pressed his clenched hand against his breast, as he awaited his doom.

" Farewell, Barthé," said Jacinta. " I cannot speak to you, whilst you are so excited. You shall hear my decision from my uncle. Farewell."

“Jacinta,” gasped Barthé. “you can at least tell me whether you love me or not;” and poor Barthé, trembling from head to foot, drew himself up and awaited with intense anxiety, her reply.

“Barthé, you tire my patience with such egregious folly.”

“Folly, Jacinta?”

“Yes, folly!”

“Oh! Jacinta, that I should live to hear this from your own lips! My love for you—my intense love, folly! Oh! Jacinta, have you forgotten the days of our youth? Have you forgotten our love then? Can my love have so increased and yours grown cold?”

“Barthé, are you mad?” asked Jacinta.

“If I am not, your words are enough to drive me so.”

“How senseless is this furious hurricane

of passion. Leave me, and let me pass on!" cried Jacinta.

"No—no, you do not love me," cried Barthé, hoarsely; "tell me so at once, and let me die?"

Jacinta felt herself tremble, as she witnessed her lover's agony. Tears burst from his eyes, and sobs from his breast. He seized her hand, and she tried in vain to withdraw it.

"Barthé," she said, in as firm a voice, and as deliberately as she could, and fixing her eyes on his, "I love you with all the tenderness of a sister—but—but let our lives be ever so long, I can never—never become your wife!"

The now thoroughly unhappy lover clasped his hands above his head, and Jacinta, having spoken the verdict, fled precipitately, unwilling

to witness the effect of her words on the playmate of her childhood, the companion of her youthful days.

Barth   wept like a child and an Italian. He ran to Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's room, and without knocking at the door, rushed into the presence of the knight.

Sir Thomas, who in his manhood had learnt to read Italian, was intent on one of the Count's romances, that is, the book was in his hand, but his thoughts were rambling to the single look Jacinta had given him, and the rose he had given to her.

In rushed Barth  , and flinging himself into a chair, burst out into a torrent of tears and lamentations.

“ *Caro amico!* ” he cried to the wondering knight, “ I shall die!—I shall die! ”

“ Die ! ” repeated Fitzgerald.

“ My days are to be for ever miserable ! ”
gasped Barthé.

“ Why so ? ” asked the knight.

“ She does not love me ! ” cried the unhappy
Barthé.

“ Who does not love you ? ” demanded the
knight, impatiently.

“ Jacinta ! ”

“ Jacinta ! impossible ! ” cried Sir Thomas,
closing his book.

“ No, she loves me not.”

“ How do you know that she does not love
you ? ”

“ With her own lips she has coldly told me
so. I shall die ! ”

“ No,” said the knight, looking on the
writhing Italian with some pity, and a good

deal of contempt. “ You will not die. Do you love her ? ”

“ Do I love her ! Love Jacinta ? ” cried Barthé, starting to his feet, and clasping his hands. “ Oh ! my friend, she is my very life, my very soul—I adore, I worship her ! Listen, Sir Thomas. We were affianced in our infancy. We became orphans in the same year ; we have grown up together. From day to day, and from hour to hour, my love has strengthened. She has ever been my only thought, my only happiness. Never for a single instant has her image been absent from my mind. All my actions have had reference to her—and now—and now, she tells me she can never be my wife, and leaves me to perish from despair and disappointment.”

“Perhaps she does not mean what she says,” said Sir Thomas.

“I know every look of her beautiful eyes, and they tell me she never can be shaken in her resolve. Oh! Sir Thomas, I am utterly miserable!”

Sir Thomas looked on and pondered for some time.

Barthé lamented, gesticulated, and writhed in fearful agony.

“Try her once more,” suggested the knight, somewhat faintly.

The Italian shook his head.

“Be a man,” cried Sir Thomas, “and wipe your eyes. You are acting more like a great girl.”

Barthé seized Sir Thomas’s hand, and intreated him to go to Jacinta and endeavour to obtain an interview for him that he might

again hear her ultimate decision, and then die.

“Go yourself,” replied the Englishman, “I do not understand ladies. I had rather not go. Curse the fellow!” he muttered in English, “I wish he would leave me and my room. I hate to see people cry; though I believe an Italian would cry if only his little finger itched.”

However, by dint of tears and entreaties, Barthé induced Sir Thomas to undertake the embassy; the knight making him promise to remain in his room till he returned.

Sir Thomas dressed himself in his velvet robe, which became him so well, and started off in quest of the beautiful Jacinta. He found her, after a considerable time lost in the search, in a large paved alcove at one end of the garden.

The air was cool and fresh; a fountain sent

up its sparkling waters, which fell into a wide basin of the whitest marble. The floor was paved with many coloured marbles. The alcove was supported on pillars, and the light, on entering, was somewhat obscure after the glare of the sun outside.

Sir Thomas made a pause ere entering the alcove.

“ Ah ! Sir Thomas. Come in. Are you seeking my uncle ?” asked Jacinta.

The knight instantly strode up and stood before her.

“ No ; I was seeking yourself,” he answered, in some embarrassment.

“ Seeking me ?” she said, with some trifling confusion in her manner.

“ Yes,” said Fitzgerald.

“ For what purpose ?”

“To deliver a message from my poor friend Barthé,” he replied.

“From Barthé?”

“Yes; he has sent me to ask your permission to come and see you, and take a last farewell. He has told me all his trouble at your rejection of his love.”

“Told you!” said Jacinta, her face crimsoning.

“Yes.”

“Then tell him his request is useless. I will not see him.”

“Why?”

“Because it can do him no good. He will only rave and weep. He is very weak.”

“And very unhappy,” put in Fitzgerald.

“I do not like his weakness,” continued Jacinta, as if not heeding the knight’s words.

“Tell him, Sir Thomas, I cannot see him, but that my uncle Guicioli shall write to him.”

Here Jacinta paused, and after a minute Sir Thomas said—

“Why, noble Jacinta, have you so suddenly discarded him?”

“That is best known to myself.”

“Pardon my presumption in proposing a question which perhaps I was not justified in asking,” said the knight.

Jacinta made no reply.

“What shall I tell Barthé?”

“Tell him he must depart without seeing me,” replied the lady.

“What else?”

“That I wish him all the happiness which this world can give, but that I will neither

wed him nor see him again till he has learnt to think of me only as a cherished sister. Now go."

Sir Thomas obeyed, and as he was leaving the alcove he turned suddenly round and perceived that Jacinta had been watching him as he went from her. Their eyes met; a crimson hue spread over the face and neck of Jacinta; the knight felt more than half disposed to retrace his steps and address her, but not being quite certain as to what he should say, he hastened to seek Barthé, leaving Jacinta to resume her seat.

Two hours passed; they seemed to Jacinta so many minutes, so deep and earnest had been her thoughts. She arose and traversed the garden. A hand seized her roughly and tremblingly; two gleaming, blood-shot eyes

were fixed on hers, and Barthé in a hoarse voice, said—

“Jacinta! Jacinta! tell me, oh, tell me why you have cast me off? Tell me, and I will depart quietly and die.”

Jacinta felt it would be useless to struggle, so she stood still.

“Speak, Jacinta—I implore. I solemnly swear, by my sacred honour, that whatever you dissolve shall never pass my lips.”

Jacinta remained silent.

“Oh, Jacinta!” he cried, his face growing more deadly pale, and his voice more husky, “Do you love another?”

“Go, Barthé,” she replied; “why torment both yourself and me with further questions?”

“Do you love another,” Barthé persisted.

“Is it not enough that I have told you I cannot wed you?”

“It is not enough. Do you love another?”

“I do.”

“Then my happiness is for ever gone!”

“Not so, Barthé, But go, and take my most sisterly affection with you.”

Barthé gave her one wild look, uttered a low groan, and in a few minutes was dashing full speed from the castle.

CHAPTER XI.

Days and weeks passed on, and Sir Thomas Fitzgerald was still a welcome guest in Count Guicioli's palace. He had recovered his fulness of limb and strength of body—in fact, he was quite convalescent. His mind, however, was somewhat disturbed, for he discovered that there was something wrong about the region of the heart, and whenever the suspicion crossed him, instead of facing it, turning it wrong side out, and ascertaining if his suspicions were true or

false, he put the thought away, resolving to examine it at some future and more convenient time.

“A more convenient time” came, and Sir Thomas found that he, the sturdy knight, was bound hand and foot in Cupid’s meshes, and in love with the charming Italian maiden, Jacinta Guicioli.

“Well,” thought Fitzgerald, “I am really in love with the beautiful Jacinta. My heart tells me I should marry her. But that is all very right as to what my heart tells me. What does my reason say? Why, reason says—‘Is it likely the Count Guicioli will give the idol of his love, the darling of his soul, the courted and admired Jacinta, to a stranger of fifty.’” Then, again, his heart told him the Italian damsel loved him. Here he sighed and paused.

Then came rushing to his mind how many lovely, young, and beautiful ladies had uselessly loved him ; and he went over the past months and days of his sojourn in Count Guicioli's palace, remembering all the looks and words of Jacinta, which told him she loved him, and that all these words and looks were not given merely to pass the time.

“ By St. George ! I had almost forgotten the dream or prophecy,” he thought. “ It has all come to pass, save the love that is to make me.”

He smiled and stroked his beard, and then continued his day-dream.

“ Yes, but if love doesn't look sharp, the day will go by.”

The smile subsided, and Sir Thomas thought how miserably the rest of his life would pass without Jacinta, and that the

monastery on the downs would be his only resource.

“Psha!” he said, in great disgust, “what would be my daily fate amongst bald pates and brown gowns, compared with Jacinta’s dark jet hair, eyes of liquid fire, and cheeks of down. By George! I won’t wait another hour; I will venture. What if I fail—there will be unhappiness and a monastery. But if I succeed—there will be happiness and Jacinta. At any rate I will make the trial.”

When this resolve was made, Jacinta was sitting in the cool alcove, listening to the plashing of the fountain, and watching the trees glittering in the sunshine. She was thinking of Sir Thomas, whilst Sir Thomas was thinking of her. Now the Italian damsel, quite unknown to herself, had fallen in love with the knight from the first time she saw

him. Why she loved him she never asked herself; and she never knew nor cared. She only knew that she did love him, and what was more to the purpose, with her true womanly instinct she knew Sir Thomas Fitzgerald loved her. Not that he had wooed her, but she well knew he loved her; still, with this knowledge in her heart, she was sorrowful and annoyed. She feared the Englishman would depart without making known his love—that he would return to his own country without taking her with him.

“I wonder if Sir Thomas will be ashamed to tell me he loves me,” she thought. “He will soon leave me and go to his own land, and what then will be my fate. I can never love another as I love him. The only thing that will remain for me will be a miserable life and—a convent!”

Having arrived at this conclusion to her melancholy suggestion she began to sing to dissipate depression, but in spite of her singing thought would return, bringing with it doubts and fears. She closed her eyes, trying to shut out reflection ; she leant her elbows on her knee, and rested her chin in the palm of her hand, and patted the smooth floor with her small foot ; but thought was not so easily driven away.

“I wish I had never seen him,” she continued to reflect. “I should have married Barthé, poor fellow ! and although I only loved him with a sisterly love, we should have got on quietly enough, and I should have made him happy. Then there is another thing which perplexes me ; my uncle will never consent to my marrying the Englishman, and I don’t even know that he wishes to wed me !

Heigho ! I feel very sorrowful. Will the knight go without speaking ? I know he loves me. He cannot hide it—he cannot deceive me. Ah, me ! Ah, me ! What will become of me ?”

Having arrived at this point in her lamentation, a footstep caused her to open her eyes, and the knight stood before her.

Jacinta started up with a cry of joy, and a look which would have betrayed her secret if she had wished to keep it.

Sir Thomas's face reddened, he hesitated, then took a seat, and Jacinta sat beside him. He had determined to speak, but he could not, and so they both sat looking at the fountain as silent as statutes.

Fitzgerald coughed.

Jacinta sighed.

Sir Thomas looked at her and began his love making by asking—

“How long have I been here?”

Jacinta’s heart beat painfully, and again she sighed, as she said in a sad and timid manner, as if she feared his answer—

“Why, Sir Thomas, do you ask that question?”

Sir Thomas folded his arms, and then unfolded them; he raised his cap, and perched it smartly on his head, curled up his moustache and smoothed down his beard, looking all the time very handsome and very perplexed, but making no reply.

“Why, Sir Thomas?” again enquired Jacinta, her hands trembling, and her throat throbbing, as she looked both affectionately and earnestly at her companion.

Sir Thomas arose and appeared to be regarding his reflection in the fountain, and Jacinta looked at him out of the fountain, and yet neither did he see himself, nor did she see him, so completely were they absorbed by the anxious thoughts passing through their minds.

Had it not been for the water, there would have been dead silence around them. It was in the heat of the day, and all things seemed to be in a state of repose, and Jacinta, restless and unable to sleep, had sought the cool alcove, and Sir Thomas, for the same reason, had sought it and found her there.

The knight raised his eyes from the water to the ceiling, and then his glance fell upon Jacinta, who instantly rose and bent towards him. Sir Thomas fixed his eyes on hers and stretched forth his hand, in an instant hers

rested in it and the next moment he pressed her to his manly breast.

Sir Thomas did not speak, but he heard Jacinta in a soft whisper, say—

“I love you!”

He would have answered, but his happiness was too great for speech.

“You will not leave me, dear Sir Thomas,” asked the lovely Italian, in a soft, tremulous voice.

“Not if I can help it, dearest Jacinta,” answered the Englishman.

“What should prevent your staying?” asked the Italian.

“Your uncle! What will he say to all this?”

“Oh! leave him to me,” returned Jacinta. “I will manage him. He loves me too well to make me miserable for ever.”

“Well, I will leave the Count to you,” said the knight.

“Have you loved me long?” asked Jacinta, her face suffused with blushes.

“Yes,” answered Sir Thomas, with a smile, and again he kissed her, saying hurriedly—

“Jacinta! we will love each other for ever!” in an instant he had left her, and regaining his own apartment, sat for nearly an hour-and-a-half without moving, so completely absorbed was he in his new found happiness.

Jacinta had returned to the palace, singing joyfully as she went. It was Count Guicioli’s custom after his *siesta* to sit and lounge over a book whilst his niece sang to him. Jacinta thought the time would never come. She wandered about the palace, then returned

to the garden and sought the happy spot where she and Sir Thomas had stood; went mentally over the love scene between them, and again returned to the palace. In fact, did all that impatience suggested, but time would not hurry for all that, and she had to wait for the usual hour, till with the lute in her hand she could seek her uncle.

“Why, Jacinta,” he said, kissing her, as was his wont, “you look as happy and joyous as a cricket.”

“And I am very happy,” returned Jacinta, tuning her lute.

A string broke; she began to repair it, thinking—which she had not done before—what she should say to her uncle, and looking at him.

“I am not merry,” said Guicioli, abstracting a letter from one of his pockets.

“Why not, dear uncle?” she asked.

“I have had this letter from poor Barthé, he is very miserable.”

Jacinta finished repairing the string, and then said—

“What does he write about?”

“About you.”

“About me!”

“Yes; read his letter.”

Jacinta put down the lute, took the letter from her uncle’s hand, unfolded it, and after reading its contents, returned it to her uncle.

“Well, my dear, what have you to say to it?”

“Say! why, that he is mad,” she replied; “all that he urges goes for nothing. He knows that I cannot wed him.”

“Jacinta, my love,” said the old Count, taking his niece’s hand, and drawing her to-

wards him, “ I never asked why you rejected Barthé, for I never wished to vex you or make you unhappy. Tell me, cannot you give the poor fellow your hand, the heart would soon follow. Your rejection of him looks capricious.”

“ I tell you, dear uncle, as I have told Barthé, that I cannot wed him. I love him as a dear brother, but nothing more,” said Jacinta.

“ But as you have no other lover, why not make poor Barthé happy ; you could not have a better man.”

“ Ah ! my darling uncle,” she cried, kneeling by his chair and stroking his hand between hers, “ but I have another love !”

“ Another love !” repeated the Count.

“ Yes ; and would you have me love one man and marry another ?” asked Jacinta, looking archly into his eyes.

"No, Jacinta, no," returned Guicioli, shaking his head. "Certainly not; but who is this other lover? Tell me who he is, and I will do my best to make you his. Do you really love the man?"

"Yes, with my whole heart!" said Jacinta, with enthusiasm.

"But does he love you?"

"With his whole soul!"

"Has he told you so?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me who he is."

"Sir Thomas Fitzgerald."

And Jacinta leaned her head against the Count's arm as she mentioned the name.

"The English knight!" cried Guicioli. "Why, my dear, he is as poor as a church mouse."

"I know he is," she answered, with a smile; "but I am rich enough for both. Now,

dear uncle, what do you say? You will not refuse to accept him as a nephew?"

"I like the Englishman, and you shall wed him," replied the Count.

"Then I will go and tell Sir Thomas," cried the damsel.

"No—no; ring the bell, and order the page to tell Sir Thomas I wish to see him."

The bell was rung, and the page was sent, and in a few minutes the knight entered the room, his hand resting on his sword-hilt, and his eyes looking from the Count to Jacinta.

"My dear uncle has given his consent," cried Jacinta.

"Yes, my good friend, I yield you my niece with all my heart, and truly happy I am to gain so valiant and virtuous a kinsman. I will give you my castle on the lake, and may every happiness attend you both."

CONCLUSION.

THEY were married, and the next day Barthé turned monk, and repented the rash act through the remainder of his life.

Sir Thomas and Jacinta lived very happily together more than twelve years, having two sons to share their happiness. At the death of Count Guicioli the palace became Sir Thomas's. The knight and his lady loved each other more and more the longer they lived together. No harsh words or unkind

acts disturbed their peace and love, and death alone put an end to their earthly bliss.

Bitter was the hour when Lady Fitzgerald, expecting her husband, who had gone out to hunt, in the morning, with several friends and followers, saw him brought home in the evening a blood-stained corpse.

A servant, with wild eyes and shrill voice, rushed into her presence, and cried—

“ Alas! alas! the good knight is dead— slain by a boar. They have brought him home, white as death, and covered with his own and the brute’s blood.”

All was confusion in the palace. The servants ran about like mad people; they talked, and wept, and screamed.

Jacinta threw herself on the body of her husband. She fixed her lips to his cold and half-closed mouth. She called to him by every

endearing epithet. Her tears ran down his clay-cold cheeks. Then raising herself she looked on him till she thought she saw him move ; but neither life nor motion were there. She took his hand, but was scarcely able to raise his stiffened arm. She could not realise her misery. Sobs and groans burst from her. The whole night she lay beside her husband's body, calling him, entreating him to live again for her sake, and weeping over him in the greatest despair and agony.

At length the bitter moment came in which she was called on to leave him for ever. At early dawn they came to take him from her. She clung to him, and in a wild shriek bid them begone ; then falling on the body her hands relaxed their hold, and she lay as lost to sense and feeling, as the clay-cold knight.

When sense returned to her the bell was

tolling. She gathered her scattered ideas. The bright sun was shining, all in her apartment was as usual, the lake looking as blue and calm as it had done on the previous day, the castle walls as white and still, the birds singing as sweetly; but her husband was dead—was gone—and, alas! was lost to her for ever on earth.

She heard the bell. The castle no longer contained him. The place where they had loved and lived so happily together had lost him, and she should never again hear his voice, never more behold his pleasant smile, never again hear the sound of his footsteps. He was gone for ever, and she was left alone!

Misery is sometimes merciful, and brings its own cure. Jacinta's sorrow ended in producing a delirious fever. Her grief took away the

power of perfect recovery. Her only joy was to sit and look at her elder boy, and trace his father's features in his face. She languished, in hopeless despair, and in little more than the space of a year she lay at rest by his side, and the white tomb erected was sacred to the memory of Sir Thomas and Lady Fitzgerald.

THE END.

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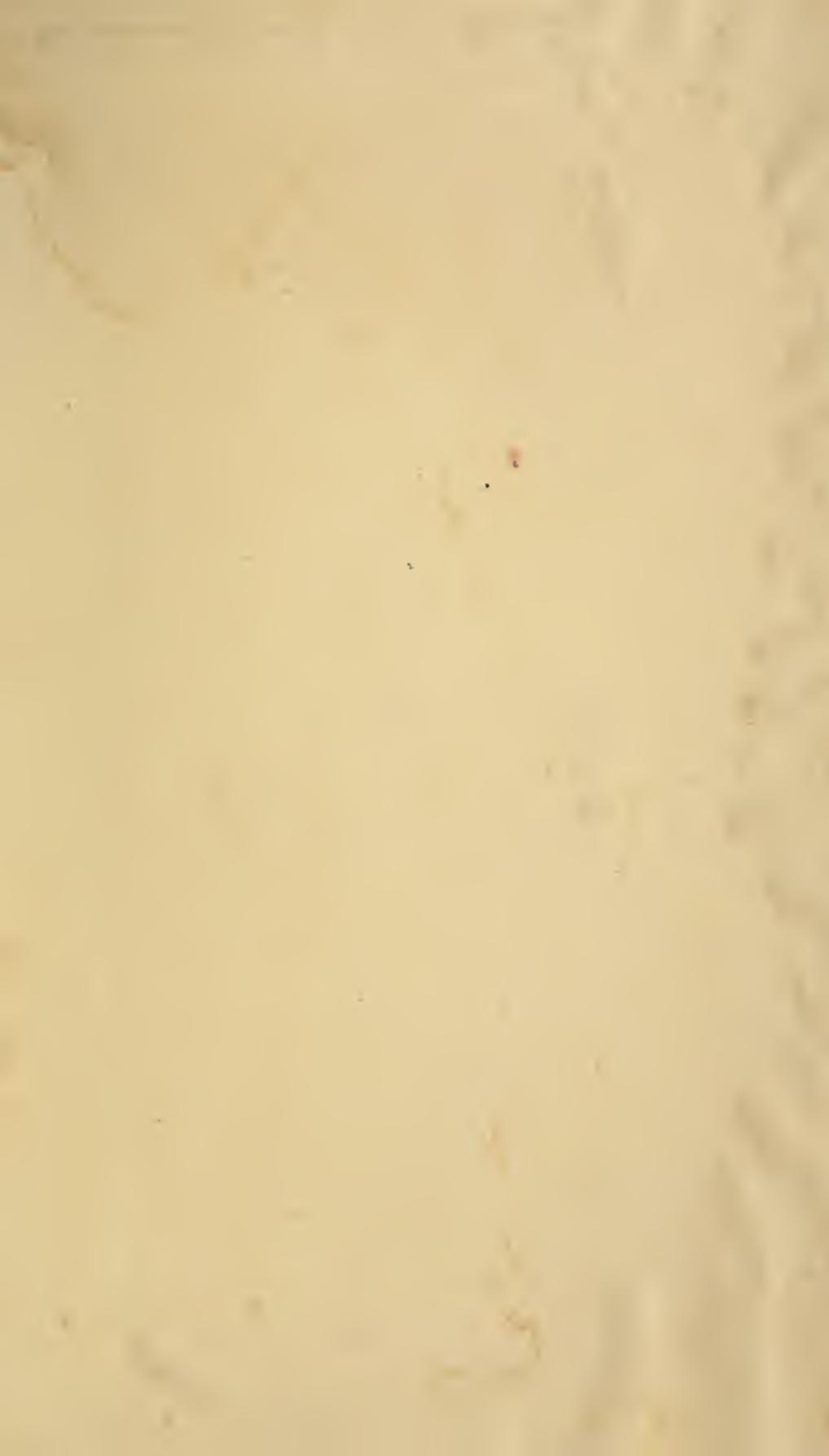
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